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Knitting Identities: Creativity and Community
amongst Women Hand Knitters in Edinburgh

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Abstract

This thesis explores how women form, perceive and communicate their sense of identity by hand knitting for leisure. Leisure, defined here as time outside of work or caring responsibilities, was selected as the focus of this research because women have some choice over how they spend this time and express themselves.

Writing on contemporary knitting has tended to frame knitting within political, artistic or commercial contexts (such as Black, 2005, 2012 and Elliot, 2015). This leaves a gap in our understanding of why women who knit for leisure do so. This is partially addressed by recent empirical research (for example Fields, 2014) that has studied social processes within knitting groups. However, research has devoted less attention to the wider motivations of women who knit alone or in groups. This is important if we consider that identity formation happens in a broader context, and may involve a constant interaction with people (Jenkins, 2004), objects and ideas, as is suggested by the findings of this study.

The research employs a qualitative approach based on Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory by way of a staged design which aims to respond to the data and minimise the influence of preconceived ideas. This aim is particularly important given the historical and contemporary stereotypes associated with knitting, and my own background as a textile historian and maker. Application of social research methods also aims to further develop the role played by empirical research in the area of textile scholarship. Data was collected in three stages; a pilot study, questionnaires with women textile bloggers and the main research stage which consisted of semi-structured interviews with knitters living in Edinburgh. Interviewees were contacted by volunteer and snowball sampling. Content analysis was supported by QSR*NVivo and involved descriptive and theoretical coding in order to identify themes in the data.

Analysis suggests knitting provides immediate social interaction and support. This could be associated with Jenkins' (2004) proposition that identity is formed by ongoing social interaction. However, there is another dimension here as knitting also enables the solitary knitter to access interactions with ideas and other people through objects and the personal memories held within them as well as through online communities. Three key findings are that knitting presents a way to be creative, productive and social. Firstly, respondents describe knitting as a balance between challenge and perceived ability, as might be described as 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002 [1992]). Secondly, this meets a need for a leisure activity that produces a tangible manifestation of effort and skill. However, the *process* of knitting is also seen to be as important, if not more so, than the final product. This insight reinforces the usefulness of empirical study of the experience of *making* textiles, and reveals additional data than studying only the final object. Thirdly, knitting is presented as a means to access meaningful social interactions and a sense of belonging to a community whether or not the knitter is a member of a knitting group. Such interactions might be online or provide a sense of continuity with previous generations of knitters in their families or women in general. Knitters see this as a way of building social capital and support.

Overall, findings suggest that identity formation and communication should be seen as a complex process that does not only involve direct social interactions but interaction with the idea of other knitters, past and present, and the practical experience of making.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to both my grandmothers. They were women who set a shining example and I think about them whenever I have highs and whenever I have lows. They live on in the stories we tell about them.

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Edinburgh in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been written by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

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Part 1 Setting the scene: Aims, research design and initial research stages

Part 1 of this thesis sets the scene for the main research findings and analysis by laying out the aims, relevant knowledge base, and research design. Additionally, this part contains the findings from the two exploratory research stages. The research aims to explore the role that hand knitting as a leisure activity plays in women's lives in order to contribute to our understanding of how they create and communicate their identities. The part discusses the state of our current knowledge regarding this aim. A review of the literature suggests that this knowledge can be organised into three key themes – that there is a strong and complex connection between making textiles and women's identities, that knitting does play a role in women's lives, and that knitting is important in our sense of self and how we communicate with other people. These ideas were investigated in this research using a design involving three stages of data collection and analysis, influenced by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). This introductory material is discussed before Part 1 ends by establishing core themes derived from the first two research stages, a pilot study and email questionnaire. Themes including productivity, skill and creativity, connecting with other people and the joy of making were generated through analysing the findings from these stages. These themes informed the design of the interviews which constituted the third research stage which is reported in Part 2.

Chapter 1 Casting on: Introduction

Introduction

This study contributes to our understanding of what it means to be a contemporary urban woman. This is done by looking at one aspect of some women's lives; their experience of hand knitting as a leisure activity. The research explores women's lived experience of knitting to find out how, through the activity, they form and communicate their sense of self. The study is motivated by my personal experience as a knitter and textile artist and is also based on the observation that knitters often devote a considerable amount of resources to the activity, which can be relaxing and satisfying but also demanding and frustrating. Furthermore, the historical association between women's femininity and domestic textile production may continue to have an impact on how women use textile production to communicate their sense of self today and therefore provides a complex area to study.

Hand knitting also presented a rich focus for the research as it seemed to me that there had been a recent rise in the number of knitters in Britain and a corresponding increase in comments from bloggers, the media and in academia. I observed how this writing has tended to frame knitting within political, artistic or commercial contexts (such as Black, 2005, 2012 and Elliot, 2015). This leaves a gap in our understanding of why women who knit for leisure do so. I suspected, as a knitter and when approaching this area from the perspective of a textile historian, that some of the potential importance of knitting to some women, including myself, was absent from these portrayals. I also felt that studying how knitting could be a way for women to communicate parts of their sense of self not necessarily yet explored through research, would be an ideal way to contribute to what we already know about women's identities and identity construction more generally. This area is partially addressed by recent empirical research, for example Fields' (2014) study of

social interaction within knitting groups. However, less is known about the motivations of women who knit alone *and* in groups. It will be argued that this nuanced difference in focus is significant if identity is conceived as an ongoing process happening in all aspects of our lives (Jenkins, 2004). I suggest that the interest hand knitting as a leisure activity has already received from the media and from within academia points towards a continuing underlying need to explore what it means to be a woman and interrogate the values and beliefs that affect our everyday behaviour. Therefore, this is a timely research project which will contribute to this underlying quest for understanding.

Given that knitting is an area which I was already familiar with as a knitter and also having previously studied as a textile historian I brought a practical, personal and theoretical understanding to the project. It will be suggested in the thesis that this helped me understand what knitters told me about their experiences. However, this prior knowledge and the stereotypes and connotations that arguably surround knitting in both the public and academic consciousness, led me to be concerned with the extent my analysis might be distorted. In order to minimise the influences of preconceived ideas, the research design was iterative and staged, influenced by Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory. As the project developed the focus gradually refined and narrowed through a pilot study, email questionnaire and a series of in depth interviews which formed the main stage of the research.

Chapter 1 'casts on' the first stitches of the thesis by setting out the research aims and rationale, the core contributions to the current knowledge base the research makes, and key contextual information regarding knitting as a leisure activity. After exploring the key aims of the research, the rationale will be presented including my personal experience of knitting and the view that making textiles by hand is a site of meaning making and creative potential. To contextualise the research, some of the contemporary context of knitting is set out alongside the ways that knitting has previously been studied. This will include a discussion of the associations between women and knitting and a brief critique of the online arenas in which knitters currently operate. Finally,

the chapter will set out the structure of the thesis as a work of two parts, the first of which includes contextual discussion, research approaches and findings from the early research stages. The second half of the thesis focusses on the findings, analysis and discussion of the main research stage.

1.2 Research focus

This section first sets out the key research aim which is to study the ways women communicate their sense of self through their hand knitting as a leisure activity. To help the reader understand how I arrived at the aims and to give an impression of the iterative nature of the study, the evolution of this research focus is next explored with the aid of excerpts from research notes. The overall aim of the study was made more achievable by developing two subsidiary aims. These aims move from the broad and abstract to the particular and concrete:

- 1 A broad theoretical 'meta' level and core aim to contribute to our understanding of how women form and communicate their identities.
- 2 A 'macro' level aim to explore the role that hand knitting for leisure plays in women's lives.
- 3 A concrete 'micro' level aim to use social research methods to capture and analyse the lived experience of women hand knitters and to consider the value of these approaches in a humanities context.

These aims evolved as the literature was scoped and through the early research stages, consistent with the influence of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) on research design. As I shall describe in Chapter 3, grounded theory aims to take an open and iterative approach to generating theory from the data, and ongoing analysis of what is being found.

The research notes I kept throughout the project capture key moments in the process of developing and refining the research focus as I became familiar with the literature and conducted the initial pilot study. Some excerpts are included here to give the reader an impression of how my aims changed as I worked out what was important to me as a researcher. These excerpts are presented in the diagram below and I have selected key elements to emphasise in each quote (shown in bold and a larger font). These excerpts show that throughout planning and executing the research a focus on women's textile production was maintained. However, the method or approach to studying this core element evolved over the period of roughly two years, as represented in the diagram. My interests moved from looking at historical case studies, through using other cultural products as sources to explore textile production, and eventually to a design which involved collected experiences directly from makers themselves. In hindsight, as I reflect upon this evolving focus, I can see how my interests have progressively moved towards capturing and interpreting the live experience of makers themselves, rather than other options such as looking through history or mediated through other objects and sources. My focus has shifted from the stories objects and narratives can tell us about ourselves to the stories we tell about ourselves and the objects we make, gift and use.

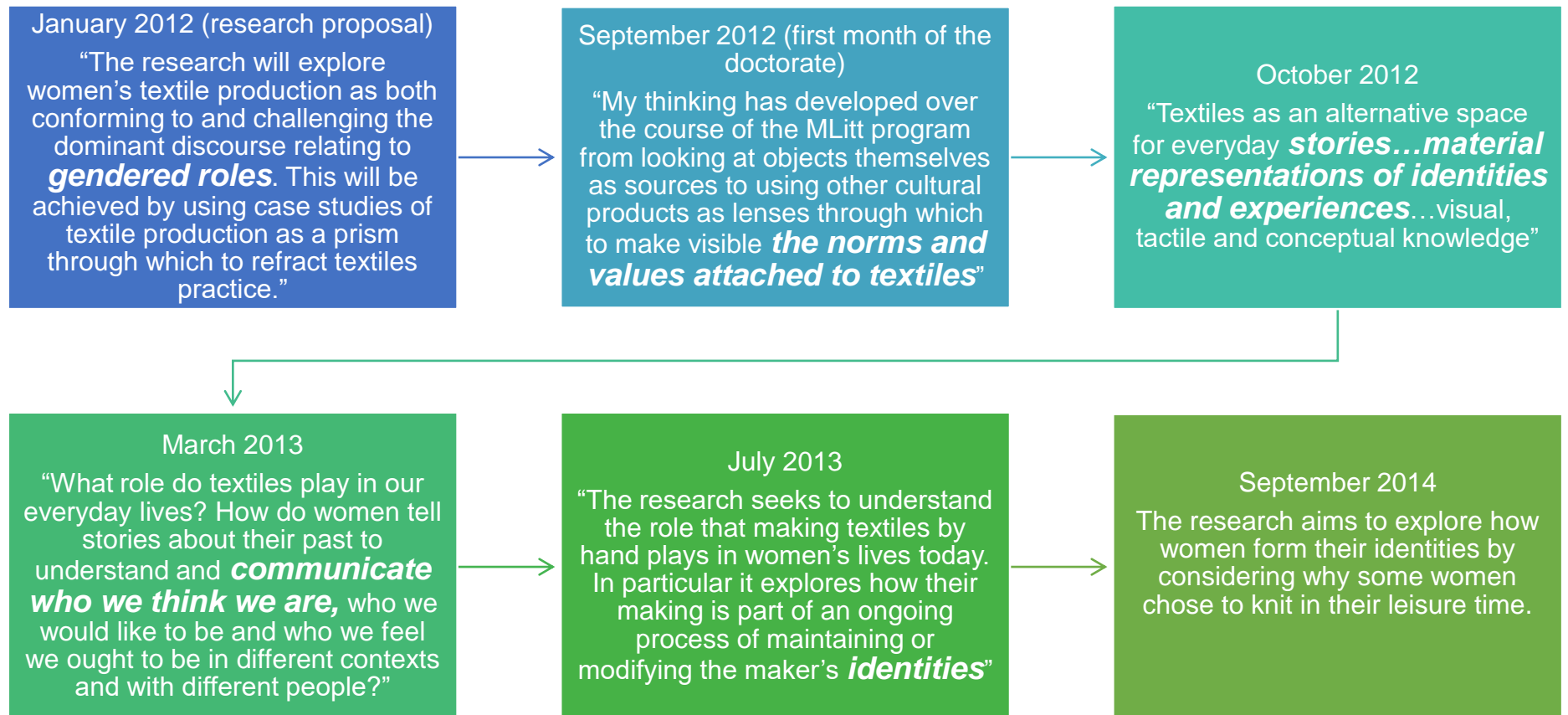


Figure 1: Evolution of the research focus

1.3 The rationale behind the study and key contributions

The rationale behind the decision to study how women communicate their sense of self by looking at textile production, specifically knitting, as a leisure activity, is multifaceted. The study is motivated by an interest in exploring the personal, academic and disciplinary facets of the relationship between creativity and identity. As such, this research springs from personal experience of, and an interest in, textiles as powerful and emotive objects and their production as a meaningful process. This section expands upon these ideas, considering the relationship between objects and our identities, my experience of making textiles and studying other women who have made textiles, and the current state of knowledge regarding knitting as a leisure activity.

The section ends by framing the key motivations to conduct this study in terms of the core contributions that it makes to our current understanding. This is divided into contributions which include studying an under-researched area, using a new application of an existing research approach, and developing new combinations of existing concepts. This section introduces the key elements of the contribution the research makes which are then developed in Sections 2.4 and 3.3 which develop the thematic and methodological contributions respectively. These ideas are finally drawn together in the final chapter of the thesis.

To begin with a broad context for the project, the research is concerned with our relationship with objects. This relationship is based on our cultural views on possessions and their significance. Mauss (2010 [1954]) and Hyde (2007 [1983]) both remind us of the rich meanings that are invested in objects around the world and the tacit ways objects aid in our communication with each other. It might be argued that capitalist consumption has deadened the potential of our possessions to speak about us. However, Miller (2010) argues that we have always made, decorated, traded and invested objects with significance

beyond their economic value and that therefore commerce does not render objects meaningless. In the UK textiles, particularly clothing, can be bought at a low cost, worn publicly to show various tastes or allegiances, and then quickly replaced. In this context of 'fast fashion', busy lifestyles, casual leisure and technologically mediated social interaction, the fact that some people are choosing to fill their leisure time making their own knitted fabric, often to be worn, is surprising. To fill leisure time today with a pursuit that can be hard work, requires the accumulation of supplies and equipment, and bears complex connotations from the past is an intriguing circumstance which drove this research.

In terms of making objects, as a woman, knitter and textile historian I have shaped the research in relation to my own personal exploration of what it means to me today to knit. The desire to understand the wider cultural significance of knitting for women is mirrored in my own quest to negotiate my identity, values and womanhood. Through making textile artworks about, and researching, the historical connections between women's sense of self, external perceptions of their identities, and the textiles they made, I became interested in my own production of textiles, and the experiences of women around me. I know that knitting is important to me and that I feel that the creativity, gift giving and socialising involved are activities where I create the person I want to be, attempt to shape how others see me, and interact with the social expectations I feel are placed upon me as a young woman. This offers me a unique viewpoint from which to approach the research which I propose led to nuanced insights and understandings, a rapport with participants, and a drive to execute the research with creativity and integrity.

The choice of knitting as an activity to study was based on several propositions which, I suggest, make it an ideal way to study women's identities. Knitting has recently received attention in the media and academic literature making it a timely focus. It is perhaps useful to acknowledge here that it is recognised that not all women knit, not only women knit, and that knitters will have different relationships with the activity. The motivations for men to knit may be different

or may be the same as those women have and indeed men who knit have received little academic attention. However, women were chosen as the focus of this study because of an intention to explore my own experiences of knitting and because of the specific connections between women and textiles. There is a cultural association between textile making and femininity and there has traditionally been a low cultural value given to knitting as a craft and women's domestic work making for a complex backdrop against which knitting can today be viewed (Parker, 2010 [1984]). It remains that a future study of men's relationship with knitting in Britain today would provide an interesting compliment to the research presented here.

Studying contemporary women's relationship with textiles in the Britain is arguably unachievable without considering history and complex past connotations. Women have used textiles as statements of power and identity, but it has also been argued that they are inevitably bound up with unequal power relationships in a capitalist, patriarchal society. Traditionally, middle and upper class women's textiles and textile production tended to be used as a symbol of their husband's wealth or their own sexual appeal (Parker, 2010 [1984]). For working class women textile production was a necessity in order to keep the family warm or fed (Rutt, 1987). In both cases textiles can be seen as tied up with the roles that dominant groups in society deemed acceptable for women, often existing in relation to others. In comparison, men arguably used textiles in the form of clothes as symbols of prestige and power. Men who produced textiles tended to hold more senior or powerful roles with more economic control (Goggin and Tobin, 2009). Whilst this telling of history may have been a reality for some, there will be others who found textiles and their production an empowering, mundane, unremarkable or joyful experience, making the study of textile production a rich and complex area for research.

In the present day, although it is difficult to find empirical evidence of how widespread knitting is, there are indications that knitting has become popular and is becoming visible in mainstream popular culture (Myzelev, 2009; Fields, 2014). Interest in knitting can be seen online in makers' blogs, a popular

example being Stephanie Pearl-McPhee who blogs as Yarn Harlot and whose success on the internet has led to several books, for example '*All Wound Up*' was number 24 in the New York Times bestseller list in 2011 (The New York Times Company, 2015). These blogs can take the form of online diaries of the author's progress with different knitted projects, reviews of exhibitions and publications, or musings on the role knitting plays in their lives. Knitting has received attention in the academic world in articles and books by authors such as Turney (2004) and Black (2012). A genre of fictional accounts of knitting has sprung up such as Sefton's (2005) knitting murder mysteries, and there remain numerous non-fiction instructional books on the shelves of bookshops and libraries.

Knitting has also received recent attention in the media, for example a search of the British newspaper, the *Guardian*, results in articles which range from 'Knitting and needlework: relaxing hobbies or seditious activities?' (Luckhurst, 2014), 'Knitting needn't be an expensive hobby' (Hodsdon, 2014) and 'Charities should stick to knitting and keep out of politics, says MP' (Mason, 2014). Although taking an American rather than British focus, the Craft Yarn Council of America (2012) conducted research suggesting that between 2002 and 2004 the number of 25-34 year olds knitting increased by 150% and the number of 18 year olds and under increased by 100%. In January 2014 BBC Radio 4 broadcast a range of programmes as part of their 'Radio 4 ♥ Knitting' season. The broadcaster even published knitting patterns to tie in with two of their flagship programmes, a 'Woman's Hour' tea cosy and 'Today' programme jumper (BBC, 2015). The popularity of knitting today may suggest that making textiles by hand plays a significant role in some women's identities. It is this role that the research aims to investigate.

The research concerns identity, a concept that has very different applications in different disciplines and also carries tacit cultural meanings that are sometimes difficult to untangle. We 'know' what we mean when we use the term in daily conversation but when we try to set out exactly what the concept covers our definition can end up a little 'woolly'. It is therefore useful to briefly

address this concept here so that the reader has an initial understanding of how it is used in this thesis. For the purposes of clarity, identity is defined as how women see themselves, how others see them, and how they wish to be seen by others. This is broadly based on the work of Jenkins (2004) and is explored further in Chapter 2.

The research follows an iterative structure, where the aims and rationale evolved as more was learned about existing research and in response to what was found during data collection. The rationale and contribution to knowledge therefore have a close relationship. The key contributions this study makes to current knowledge are set out here and developed further later in the thesis. The first key contribution the research makes is to explore under-researched areas, namely by studying: women who are not obviously knitting with political, artistic or therapeutic motivations; a leisure pursuit which is arguably traditionally thought of as a feminine activity; and an everyday and familiar activity rather than something that is extreme or unusual. The second contribution the research makes is concerned with the methodology the research adopts and is to apply new approaches to existing areas of study, specifically exploring the potential of a social science approach, including the use of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) in a humanities context. Thirdly, the study also makes a contribution to current knowledge by developing different applications and combinations of existing concepts, including theories of creativity and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002 [1992]), serious leisure (Stebbins, 2006), and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

A review of the existing literature regarding contemporary knitting found that some types of knitting are more researched than others, as will be argued in Chapter 2. Some of the research and media discussion surrounding contemporary knitting refers to it as a 'movement' investing it with a political impetus and portraying it as new, political, activist, artistic and subversive. The existing literature tends to focus on knitters who are celebrities (Pentney, n.d.), bloggers (Orton-Johnson, 2012), craftivists (Myzelev, 2009) or artists (Maharaj, 2009), or the therapeutic benefits of knitting (Corkhill, 2014). This

focus on the more 'glamorous' or extreme aspects of contemporary knitting might be symptomatic of Stalp's (2015) observation that much sociological research tends towards economic contexts and that, where it concerns familiar and everyday areas, such as textiles, research concentrates on the new and exciting. This research addresses a gap in the existing knowledge base by looking at knitters who are not necessarily represented by these categories and for whom knitting is part of their daily lives.

Knitting has historically been assigned low cultural value as a craft and as part of women's domestic work. There are numerous instances where women's textile production has not merely been de-valued as feminine but femininity itself has been constrained, shaped and policed through textile production as Parker (2010 [1984]) explored in her influential study of embroidery. Furthermore, Mayne (2015) commented at a recent conference focused on knitting that studying things that are familiar and we think we 'know', such as the social and therapeutic benefits of knitting, is important. She argues that their familiarity devalues them in our thinking, and diminishes their significance to us. As an activity that women are engaging in today that is important to some women and as an activity that brings with it a history of economic necessity and low cultural value, knitting is a fascinating case for the study of contemporary womanhood.

Leisure time is not straightforward to define and is highly context specific (Roberts, 2006) but is a space where we are more free than at other times to choose our activities and who we do them with. However, for the purposes of this research leisure time will be considered to refer to time not spent in work or care, including paid and unpaid work, self-care and caring for other people. Roberts (2006) provides three key reasons why we should study leisure. Firstly, leisure has economic implications given that we often devote part of our income to leisure activities. It is therefore important for businesses to understand why people engage in leisure activities and what leisure activity they engage in. Secondly, and more relevant to this study, it is important to understand leisure because it is a time when we can express ourselves and

therefore we have the potential to see people's desires and interests that might otherwise remain hidden (Roberts, 2006: 6). Thirdly, leisure plays an educative role by providing an arena to learn and try out new skills without serious implications arising from failure. Therefore, by studying leisure we again can further understand what people want to achieve in their lives that they may not express in their working lives.

It has been suggested that leisure is important as a site for studying identities, if not more so, than traditional definitions of roles such as work, family and religion (Gillespie et al., 2002). In addition to leisure being a space to express oneself and experiment, Bourdieu (1984) suggests leisure activities also offer us predefined sets of norms and values. Therefore leisure offers us a way to explore both individual desires and societal expectations and the interaction between them and is therefore 'a forum within which to re-construct gendered identities' making leisure an ideal site to study women's contemporary identities (Green, 1998). Knitting as a leisure activity is also an interesting site to explore women's identities because of the specific relationship between women and their leisure time. The study of how women use their leisure time has become a site of increased academic scrutiny since the 1980's and has, according to Henderson and Gibson's (2013) found that women tend to lack a sense of entitlement to leisure time, most frequently undertake leisure activities within their own homes, and experience their leisure time as more fragmentary and unstructured compared to men's leisure. Therefore, in these respects knitting seems a classic example of a leisure activity suited to women in that it requires little equipment, can be easily picked up and put down as other tasks demand, and can be done inside the home. However, knitting is interesting in that it straddles locations and traditional gendered spaces as women take knitting into pubs, cafés and onto public transport. Knitting therefore provides a way to study both a woman's private and public identities, and something which she can choose to both be identifiable as, in the case of knitting on a bus, or discreet about, as she keeps her needles in her bag. Furthermore, this research responds to recent claims by Stalp (2015: 267) that women's leisure activities, particularly those associated with feminine stereotypes such as

knitting remain under-researched, '[c]learly, women's sedentary and/or feminine leisure pursuits are not on the research radar in either leisure or sociology'.

It is important to constantly further our understanding of how we form our identities and how we interact with each other and the objects we make, give and own. Authors such as Miller (2010) have demonstrated how important objects are in our lives. Miller (2010) argues, as will be expanded upon in Chapter 2 that recent research has tended to diminish the role that objects play in our lives by presenting them as symbolic representations of a true inner identity. Instead, he urges, researchers should see objects as active parts of the creation of our identity as an ongoing process and therefore worthy of continuing empirical study. If we consider social structures and roles in a Bourdieusian light then we similarly can think of identity as an ongoing interaction which requires sustained study. Bourdieu (1984) argues that we are both shaped by social structures such as expectations and roles, and also that we shape them through our repetition or challenging of these ideals. Viewed in this light it is important to continue to further our understanding of an ever-changing relationship with objects, roles and ideas. What is more, in the case of a process of producing handmade objects, such as knitting, the extent to which we might be able to create and communicate identity is heightened in comparison to a mass-produced item where we do not have the same control over appearance, function and texture. Knitting as a process presents an ideal focus for research which seeks to understand how women choose to create and communicate their identities during their leisure time.

In addition to the thematic motivation for conducting this research discussed above, the third research aim (*to consider the potential of a social science approach to research in this context*) evolved through engagement with existing literature and provides an additional to the motivation behind the study. Reviewing existing literature relevant to this study, reported in Chapter 2, highlighted the potential methodological contribution this research could make. It will be argued that to date there has been an inclination towards

researching the meaning of textiles through the lenses of other cultural products. Miller (2010) draws our attention to the tendency of research to take a semiotic approach to interpreting objects and argues the consequence of this trend is that objects are viewed as passive vehicles for meaning. Instead he suggests we should view objects as playing a far more active role in our lives. If this argument is translated to the production of objects we could also speculate that to understand this process requires investigations which strip away some of the mediated meaning and instead speak to makers themselves. This research was therefore designed to capture and interpret what women themselves said about their knitting. Choosing to adopt grounded theory, a research approach adapted from social science studies, offers additional benefits. These include the design of a structured and trustworthy navigation of the proliferation of stereotypes and existing concepts attached to knitting and women's textile production, as will be explored in further detail in Chapter 3.

This research uses an approach that is not often used in the disciplinary area of textile scholarship. It used a design influenced by grounded theory as developed by Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1967]) and further developed by Charmaz (2006). This approach was driven by the aim to uncover the lived experience of being a woman today by asking those women and building theoretical propositions based on their viewpoints. In addition, taking this decision also offered the chance to explore the potential for cross disciplinary research design. Therefore, in addition to the contributions this study makes to our understanding of knitting and women's identities, the contribution to knowledge will also be considered in terms of the viability of applying social science research approaches to new areas of everyday life.

The final contribution this research makes did not stem from the original research aims but rather from the analysis. This contribution relates to the novel application of a set of theoretical frameworks including concepts such as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002 [1992]; 2014), serious leisure (Stebbins, 1985; 1992), the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), and social capital (Putnam, 2000). This

contribution is addressed in the analysis chapters of the thesis, Chapters 6, 7, and 8, and expanded upon in Chapter 9.

1.4 Knitting in historical, academic and contemporary contexts

To provide a context for this study this section introduces the different contexts against which contemporary knitting can be viewed. These are expanded upon in the next chapter. This section first sets out a brief definition of knitting before considering the impact today of the ways in which knitting has been studied in the past. The section ends by considering the role that knitting plays in contemporary Britain, including a brief consideration of knitting on the internet. Further contextual information about contemporary knitting can be found in Chapter 2.

Knitting has been defined as the 'creation of fabric from a single thread, formed into horizontal rows of individual loops that intermesh with each successive row of loops' (Black, 2012:7). The fabric is built in rows of loops, rather than knots and therefore unravels if cut, loops are 'meshed into the fabric by being looped into bights of a course above. Only in the last course are the loops locked by being laterally looped into the same course' (Rutt, 1987:7). More complex patterns can be made by making these loops twist, overlap and merge, 'What create these expressions are alterations in the ways that the thread is knitted around itself and with previous stitches along the thread' (Busch, 2013:9). Lace patterns can be made by creating intentional holes in the fabric. By using circular or multiple needles knitted fabric can be tubular rather than flat. Also important to note is that knitting involves a single length of yarn travelling backwards and forwards along the fabric, unlike weaving where separate lengths make the warp and weft. However, multiple lengths of yarn can be used in knitting, for example, to include different colours. Knitting may easily be confused with crochet, done with one needle with a hooked end.

Both result in similar chains of stitches, however crochet, arguably less popular today, tends to create a denser, less open fabric.

The history of hand knitting is not straightforward. As with other textiles, lack of documentary sources and surviving objects can present challenges to the historian. Knitting, seems particularly absent from historiography, with key academic books arguably limited to Rutt (1987), Turney (2009), and Black (2012). These are supplemented by more focused articles such as Arnold's (2010) examination of gender and Fair Isle knitting, Gilbert's (2012: 90) 'reading' of the stitches in a knitted jumper to 'elucidate the economic and social circumstances in which the work was done', and Abrams' (2006) research regarding knitters on Shetland. A lack of historiographies may be due to the little archaeological evidence existing compared to, for example weaving which leaves physical traces in the form of stone weights and post holes (Wayland Barber 1996). However knitting, and its probable predecessor netting (which used a single needle and short lengths of fibre) have left some traces. Iron and bronze netting needles have been identified as originating in Roman Europe, although most would likely have been bone or wood and more perishable. The earliest examples of netting date from Coptic Egypt and nailbinding (another predecessor to knitting using only one needle) from late Mesolithic Denmark (about 4200BC). When knitting was first used is less clear, although the 15th century is discussed by Rutt (1987) and Wild (1988) as a possible date of introduction into Europe. We arguably know more of the history of embroidery as, for example tapestries and embroideries were entered into the official records of aristocratic and royal households; see for example Levey (1998).

Rutt (1987:3) suggests that a lack of academic texts in this area may have led to 'a distinct bias towards the romantic' and the repetition of myths. There has been increased academic attention since Rutt (such as Turney, 2009). However, there remains short histories in non-academic sources such as instructional books, which may serve to perpetuate the romantic. Rutt (1987) illustrates his claim using the much-told story of Queen Elizabeth being the first

to wear silk knitted stockings and swearing to never wear woven ones again. He claims Queen Elizabeth I did receive a gift of silk stockings, but there is no evidence these were the first in Britain or even the first she had worn. Parker (2010 [1984]) has demonstrated that novels and personal documents can inform us about the practicalities and cultural meaning of embroidery where surviving examples are sparse or without provenance and a similar approach might be beneficial in the study of knitting.

Historians of knitting might also be challenged by the expert eye required to 'read' knitted objects and the challenge of viewing historical objects with the modern gaze. For example, the differences between hand, frame and rotary frame knitting can be subtle but socially and economically significant (Cooke and Tayman-Yilmaz, 1999). Some authors such as Gilbert (2012) use their own experience as knitters to approach historical objects as if they were going to replicate them. However, an 'insider' perspective is not without issues (see Section 3.7). Arnold (2010) suggests her experience of contemporary design hampered her ability to empathise with knitters from the past as her frame of reference was shaped by notions of creativity as innovation rather than the values of tacit knowledge and replication. Fisk (2012:170) similarly suggests that when we interpret the past we do so for our own means and with a tendency to see simplified patterns of behaviour rather than complexity; 'we are making our own samplers and patchwork... cutting life's fabric into pre-determined shapes and sizes, stitching them together along rigorously straight lines.' Therefore, any history of knitting must recognise its own partiality, 'with many gaps in the seams' (Fisk, 2012:170).

Rutt (1987) remains widely cited, for example by Turney (2009), and Goggin and Tobin (2009). However, this largely unreferenced source is potentially problematic for readers seeking to trace the sources of his claims. Rutt (1987) explains his decision not to include source information so as to make his text more accessible. Although conjecture, it could be suggested this decision was taken with a female, non-academic audience in mind who were assumed to be unable to cope with citations. Although not necessarily lacking in credibility,

our current knowledge of the history of knitting is partly made up of stories told and re-told in the introductory chapters of pattern- and instructional books. Without source information it is difficult to assess the quality of this information.

The state of the historiography of knitting can be understood using Bourdieu's (1984) notion of purity in cultural fields. The lack of an established chronology and academically researched and referenced monographs can be understood as reiterating the cultural status of knitting as feminine and impure – lacking the genius of artists and museum collections that form the 'essence' of fine art. This is not to argue that knitting should be valued as an art form by conforming to the values of the art world or that knitting should be treated in the same way as other cultural objects such as Fine Art by academics and institutions such as art galleries.

The status of knitting and other textile production methods as 'amateur' has also effected the ways in which we think about, and study textiles. As Jackson (2010) observes, amateur makers have often not received academic attention as the activity takes place behind closed doors in the domestic space. Furthermore, he argues (in a similar manner as will be suggested in Chapter 7) that amateur makers blur traditional divisions between work and leisure and have therefore 'made an uneasy subject matter' which has fallen 'between categories' (Jackson, 2010: 6). Amateurs are not generally included in exhibitions or publications regarding art or design, leaving the area somewhat understudied, although there has arguably been a recent increase in academic research regarding craft which can include amateurs (Knott, 2015; Luckman, 2015). At worse amateurs may be viewed as 'the object of disdain' (Jackson, 2010:6), an assertion which is also made in the context of textiles by authors such as Turney (2004). A call to look more closely at the type and meaning of the labour associated with amateur making, and the assertion that the gendered nature of this labour has previously led to it being overlooked, is echoed by Bratich and Brush (2011).

It is worth noting that the assumption that amateur making has less critical value than professional art and design production, especially with regards to creativity and innovation, may have some foundation. Paulsen and Staggs (2005) studied country fairs in America that held competitions for domestic products including textiles and food, and found that judges favoured a high degree of skills within certain narrow boundaries and did not award produce which strayed outside of the established way of doing things. It is worth noting that this is only one context in which amateurs operate. Indeed, although some context in which knitting inhabits in Britain may be equally conservative others, particularly online, do encourage and facilitate innovation and imagination. Academic study of knitting in an amateur context must consider and contend with the low cultural value that has been and is still attributed to this discipline. Furthermore, it is arguable that the status of some knitting and the lack of empirical research into this area is linked with gender given the domestic contexts in which much amateur production is situated (Lees-Maffei and Sandino, 2004). Empirical research in this area arguably requires a research approach which helps the researcher see exactly what has previously fallen 'between categories' including leisure and work, and creative and decorative, by lifting the veil of previously taken-for-granted assumptions (Jackson, 2010: 6).

Since about 1990 hand knitting seems to have had a resurgence, as a political or social statement, a leisure activity of both men and women, an art technique and in fashion (Black, 2005, 2012). Interest in other crafts such as crochet and dressmaking has increased but arguably not to the extent of knitting (Myzelev, 2009). Futterman Collier (2011) found knitting was the most common technique undertaken in a sample of women, many of whom had crocheted, embroidered or done cross-stitch in the past. Carpenter (2010) argues that this revival has been gradual, with do-it-yourself becoming aligned with a socially conscious ethos in the 1990s and then being 'thoroughly subsumed within popular culture' during the 2000s.

Knitting patterns have long been included in women's magazines and Ritchie (2015) has suggested this was particularly common in the years after the Second World War in women's magazines. Knitting currently maintains these links with magazines, although in two different arenas. The first might be termed politically conscious women's publications and the second publications perhaps more likely to be found on newsagent's shelves. Groeneveld (2010) points out that the 1990s saw the introduction of third wave feminist magazines which effected the popularity of knitting by promoting and politicizing activities traditionally associated with domestic femininity. Magazines such as BUST continue the tradition of women's magazines including free knitting patterns. Groeneveld (2010) argues these magazines encouraged women to knit by reiving knitting as a leisure activity rather than domestic chore.

Knitting patterns can still be found in 'Women's Weekly', a magazine that has been published in Britain for over 100 years. Entering the search term 'knitting' into one of the leading magazine subscription sites in the UK returns six publications specifically concerning knitting including 'Knitting', 'Simply Knitting', 'Knit Now' and 'Knit Today', and several other publications centred more widely around crafts. Whilst dedicated publications cannot alone indicate popularity, their presence begins to build a picture of the current interest in knitting. Groeneveld (2010) suggests that since the 2000s knitting has also been visible in mainstream media including newspapers, thus increasing its popularity further, particularly with celebrity knitters being discussed (Parkins, 2004). Also potentially contributing to the increase in the number of people learning to knit is the academic and mainstream discourse which suggests that knitting can benefit mental health (Corkhill, 2014).

The increase in popularity of knitting may have a relationship to the introduction of feminist magazines, and the continued support in women's magazines more generally. However, it may also bear some relationship to a deliberate marketing campaign initiated by yarn producers. Sheard (2014), one of the founders of large British yarn company Rowan, attributes the increase in knitters to the influence of Alice Fixx, then working in PR. Sheard suggests that

in the late 1990s the Craft Yarn Council of America (CYCA) organised a meeting of a wide variety of people involved in the hand knitting industry and it was here that it was agreed that Fixx would be hired to promote knitting. Fixx noticed that some celebrities were knitting and used this to market the hobby as modern and fashionable with simple patterns and luxurious yarns. Sheard (2014), then the director of the Hand Knitting Council (a British organisation), brought similar ideas back from the CYCA meeting and Rowan opened small concessions in department stores, employed knowledgeable staff, and ran beginner classes. To continue providing some indication of the current types of publication available to knitters today, there has also been an increase in instructional books (Myzelev, 2009), again evidence of the popularity of the activity. Additionally, knitting and knitting groups have, perhaps surprisingly, become the focus of a number of murder mystery novels by authors such as Canadeo (2009) and Sefton (2005).

Traditional styles of knitting have entered popular culture, for example the main character of Danish TV series 'The Killing', shown in Figure 2 below (first broadcast on BBC in 2012) is famous for wearing chunky and distinctive pattern jumpers variously referred to by some as Scandinavian but seemingly Faroese in design. In addition to encouraging viewers to knit their own similar garments fans can purchase hand knitted replicas from the Faroe Islands for around €310 (Gudrun & Gudrun, n.d.). The recent legal battle about the rights to the star pattern used in one of these jumpers is an interesting illustration of the culture-clash between old and new knitting (see Townsend, 2014, for example). Furthermore, Sofie Gråbøl, the actress who plays Sarah Lund, is quoted in *The Guardian* (Anthony, 2011) as saying 'It [the sweater] tells of a woman who has so much confidence in herself that she doesn't have to use her sex to get what she wants' suggesting that the traditional style knitwear was used to make a comment about gender roles, but also problematically seeming to assert that knitting and attractiveness in a woman are at odds.



Figure 2: Sarah Lund (2012)

Lees-Maffei and Sandino (2004) argue that knitting as a historicist and historically referencing activity is encouraged by instructional and academic literature on craft. They argue that whether the objects in question are handmade or technologically produced they are invested with the power to provide access to a nostalgic pre-industrial lifestyle through their association with an imagined history. Whereas, for example, an instructional book on modern dressmaking may rarely denote many words to the history of dressmaking, it is more common for knitting books to include patterns and stitches specifically because of their historical associations and authenticity. It seems that today some knitting gains value depending on the extent to which it accurately references the past, rather than suits today's needs. Building on the narrative of craft as nostalgic Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007) argue that today's knitters use the connotations of authenticity and nationalism to reinforce their identities rather than to try to naively recreate a romanticised version of the past.

Today knitting exists in both offline and online contexts. Knitting groups are often seen in pubs and cafes around the country and it is not unusual to see someone knitting on a bus or train. Knitting has also acquired political connotations, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Working from patterns designed by someone else is problematic when measured using a criterion which instead favours the lone artistic genius (Bratich and Brush, 2011). This has been supported more widely in terms of women artists and makers by influential authors such as Parker and Pollock (1995). Traditionally knitting has been valued more for its function or economy than its aesthetic appeal. This has arguably marginalised them from the public arena characterising knitting as merely a 'little hobby' (Nelson et al. 2005).

Knitting is today used alongside other textile crafts to make political statements in both artworks and street-level activism by drawing attention to, amongst other issues, the use of sweated labour (Bratich and Brush, 2011) and examples of misogyny (Pentney (2008)). Authors such as Pentney (2008) argue that knitting now can be a feminist action simply by means of highlighting its functional but also aesthetic and therapeutic potential, and thus ascribing value. Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007) and Pentney (2008) suggest knitting can be used as such a tool because its low position on a cultural hierarchy and class and gender associations mean it is an activity which is easy to attach subversive ideas to. Amongst these knitters there is a shared aesthetic of irony and fun as unremarkable aspects of our cities such as lampposts and railings are encased in knitted cosies, rude words and challenging quotes are hidden in seemingly benign cross stitched images, and knitting groups adopt humorous names such as 'Stitch n' Bitch', 'Twisted Stitchers' and 'Purls of Wisdom'. It may be easy to portray a simple narrative where knitting used to be associated with drudgery and oppression and has now been re-branded as empowering and able to communicate political messages, however it is likely that the history of knitting is more complex than this and that women have always adapted some of the craft for their own enjoyment, amusement and to tell their own stories (Carpenter, 2010). Portraying knitting as 'reclaimed' from

patriarchy arguably risks taking knitting out of the hands of the previous generations of women for whom it was always 'theirs' and indeed the hands of those women knitters today who do not identify with the narrative of politically charged knitting. The extent that knitting has been 're-signified' for the 21st century is debated further in Chapter 2.

Knitting is also now used in artistic practice as well as a hobby, often to comment on issues such as heritage and the transmission of skill between generations, for example the work by artist and designer Helen Robertson (2015), see Figure 3. Compared to studio crafts largely by men, and Fine Art, knitting has, as a domestic and feminine craft, traditionally been given less value and esteem. Women and textiles have not been included in the dominant notions of an artistic hierarchy (Nelson et al., 2005). This has been evidenced with examples such as the ridiculing of women's knitting groups as gossip circles. *The Knitting Map*, a knitted artwork produced as part of the city of Cork being named as European Capital of Culture in 2005 received critical comment regarding its expense. It could be argued that a similar cost devoted to a more traditional artwork being commissioned or purchased might not receive the same criticism. Jools Gilson (2015), an artist who led the community who produced the artwork explained in a newspaper article that knitting was chosen as a medium to stimulate the 'idea about imagining that women's lives mattered powerfully, that the skills they had in their hands, often learnt from their mothers and grandmothers, might have real and powerful cultural space'. She argues that a more traditional artwork was rented by the city for a similar price, implying there are different standards against which public art is measured.



Figure 3: Helen Robertson (2015)

Knitting has an online community in the form of blogs but is also largely focused on the website 'Ravelry'. 'Ravelry' is a website mainly aimed at knitters but also those who crochet, and performs several functions including hosting discussion pages and providing a marketplace for pattern designers to publish and sell (or give away) their work. The website also acts as the main social media platform for knitters and people who crochet. Members can upload a photograph of themselves to their profile, post information about their lives and their knitting, and communicate with other knitters. The internet and digital cameras have made it easier for knitters to communicate and Chansky (2010) argues this has also increased the popularity of knitting as the craft is publicised and shared. Beginners can also find a considerable amount of support online, from instructional videos to discussion boards. For example, on 'Ravelry', members can post a request for help on a difficult part of a pattern, even uploading a photograph of the offending mistake, and receive

help from other knitters or even the pattern designer, no matter where in the world they are based. This also serves as a 'quality control' for knitting pattern designers as mistakes or omissions in patterns are quickly identified and, given that many patterns are available as downloads, readily rectified as the designer can simply upload a corrected version or errata. Another website where knitting and knitting patterns are posted online is 'Etsy', however this differs from 'Ravelry' for covering all crafts and for having a focus on selling end products rather than facilitating connections between makers. 'Etsy' is an online marketplace where sellers can open virtual 'shops' with an emphasis on handmade and homemade objects. This includes but is not limited to knitting. Although started with a strong focus on small producers, the website has arguably expanded beyond this remit, with an increase in some 'hand' producers operating on near factory scale.

The online worlds of 'Ravelry' and 'Etsy' are not without criticism. The option to work from home associated with increases in information and communication technologies, including website such as 'Ravelry' and 'Etsy', has been portrayed in politics and the media as being empowering for women as it enables them to combine the domestic and child caring responsibilities they are still often ascribed with financial income (Gregg 2008). Gregg (2008:295) critiques this portrayal and argues that firstly, this lifestyle is dependent upon 'the labour of many other women who remain in inflexible, often dangerous manual jobs' and secondly, the problematic overwork within a capitalist and Western economy. She suggests the neoliberal ideal of empowerment for the individual comes 'at the expense of the other two revolutionary ideals – equality and solidarity' (Greer, 2008:296). The new economies of handmade products sold online and online 'new media workers' (including content creators, web designers and web broadcasting) more generally have also been critiqued by authors such as Gill (2002:71) who accuses them of hiding 'pervasive insecurity, low pay, and long hours' and of replicating a traditional associations between women and low pay. 'Ravelry' as

a social network could also be critiqued as other online social networks have been, for portraying idealised lifestyles rather than realities (Liu, 2008).

The introduction of 'Ravelry' and 'Etsy' has had another consequences, the blurring of distinctions between professional and amateur. This has been examined by Humphreys (2009:1) who suggests that it is no longer appropriate to use commercial and non-commercial to describe the different activities going on within sites such as 'Ravelry', but that we should instead view this as a hybrid space where 'financial and social economies co-exist'. She describes the complex exchanges of intellectual property, physical items, and social capital that are facilitated by 'Ravelry' including exchanges which are difficult to quantify such as when a knitter notes what yarn they used and where this was bought, thus publicising the shop, or hidden exchanges such as the cut that the money handling website 'Paypal' takes from every transaction. There are some interesting attempts to distinguish between commercial and amateur sellers, for example Humphreys (2002) notes that moderators police a discussion board where members can sell excess yarn in order to ensure this is not an arena for professional sellers or those who have bought yarn specifically to sell at a profit through 'Ravelry'. Humphreys (2002:11) highlights the need for further study of the intricate networks of exchange that are contained within 'Ravelry' including 'charity economies' (users knit for charity), 'reputation economies' (including gift giving involving an assumption of reciprocity and the seeking of status through exchange). Contrastingly, authors such as Luckman (2013:249) argue that websites such as 'Etsy' have contributed to a return 'of credibility to previously disparaged women's craft practices'. These are important ideas to study further, and are returned to in Section 2.4, as arguably gendered notions such as labour, economy, craft and value have a relationship with exploitation and power differences as well as innovation and empowerment.

1.5 Thesis structure

This section outlines how the rest of the thesis is structured to develop from contextual information to descriptive findings to analytical interpretations and conceptual propositions. The thesis is structured in two parts, the first part sets the scene and contains aims, explores the existing knowledge base, details the research design and discusses the initial themes generated through analysing the first two research stages.

Chapter 2 looks at the different contexts in which the women's knitting during their leisure time could be situated. This informed the design of the research by suggesting a gap in existing knowledge and the interpretation of the data. This chapter first considers knitting and a process of identity-making, then explores the academic literature concerning knitting today. The chapter will argue that the recent literature tends to focus on knitting which is artistically or politically motivated and gives less attention to knitters for whom it is a leisure activity. Additionally, it suggests there is potential for research in this area with an empirical focus and the generation of theory with a close relationship to the everyday experiences of women.

Chapter 3 details the methodology used in the research in order to contextualise the findings and enhance the transparency of the research. The chapter includes the research approach, design, and method of data collection and analysis before also considering issues such as my position as an insider and outsider, knitter and researcher, and sets out how the quality of the research was enhanced by this strategy. The chapter details how the research was conducted from a critical realist stance and designed using a grounded theory approach. The research consists of three research stages, a pilot, an email questionnaire, and a series of in depth semi-structured interviews with a volunteer sample of women knitters living in Edinburgh, Scotland, during 2013 and 2014.

Chapter 4 describes the key themes generated by the pilot study and email questionnaires. This chapter illustrates how each stage of data collection is informed by the methodological and thematic conclusions of the previous one. This chapter argues that knitting is important in some women's lives and something they devote considerable time and effort to. The process of knitting is a way for women to access their creativity, skill and productivity and to interact with other knitters, from the past and present. These themes helped develop the interview schedule used on Stage 3.

Part 2 of the thesis contains the findings, analysis and discussion which resulted from the research. Chapter 5 describes the findings from the interviews, the third and main stage of the research. The interview transcripts and my reflective notes were coded into descriptive categories which are used to organise this chapter. Consistent with the grounded theory approach taken in this research the chapter includes a minimum of interpretation and instead focuses on giving the reader a clear and honest portrayal of how the women interviewed felt about their knitting. This chapter develops a picture of the participants as women who are committed to their knitting and place a high value on its place in their lives and relationships.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 contain three key themes that result from analysing the findings. Chapter 6 looks at how respondents describe knitting as a balance between challenge and perceived ability, as might be described as creativity and a 'flow' experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002 [1992], 2014). The chapter considers creativity as providing a sense of control, autonomy and self-expression. In Chapter 7 knitting is understood as a way for the women to fulfil their need for a leisure activity which is productive and skilled. Additionally, it is a way to build an identity by referencing the past, communicating a current identity, and developing a sense of a future identity by interacting with the idea of knitting and knitters in the past, present and future. Chapter 8 looks at how knitting is a way to connect with other people, to generate social capital and experience a sense of belonging. The chapter also contains discussion

regarding the extent that some people are excluded from this community, whether through lack of economic or cultural capital.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by recapping the original aims of the research to contextualise the discussion section which draws together the themes from the analysis chapters. The research aims and key contributions that the research makes to the current knowledge base are summarised before the experience of conducting the research is reflected upon. The chapter ends by suggesting theoretical propositions which are drawn from the analysis of the data.

Chapter 2 Knitting and women's identities in the past and present: The knowledge base

Introduction

This chapter reviews key elements of the existing knowledge base regarding women's hand knitting by considering the cultural, social, historical and economic contexts against which it could be viewed. The chapter therefore summarises the existing knowledge base regarding knitting and women's identities and looks at the academic discourse surrounding contemporary knitting. The chapter explores three core ideas which stem from existing literature:

- There seems to be a close and complex connections between women's identities and femininity and the textiles they make and use. The chapter asks which areas of textile scholarship are more and less understood.
- We might surmise that knitting plays a role in women's lives, because of our existing understanding of textile production and women's identities more widely, and also because of the proliferation of old a new stereotypes and connotations surrounding knitting and women who are knitters. For example, once associated with older women or kitsch Christmas jumpers, knitting is now also associated in academic literature and the media with 'new femininity' and activism. The chapter questions what is known about knitting in various contexts, such as political activism, artistic and commercial practices, and as a leisure activity.
- We know objects and knitting are important in our lives. This chapter questions what different ways have been used to study objects, textiles

and knitting and what I can learn from these existing approaches to help design this study.

These three core findings influenced the development of the research aims and also the research design, as will be discussed in the next chapter. The chapter ends by providing an overview of current knowledge regarding the research question and suggests avenues that require further research.

The literature review holds a disputed position within grounded theory, the approach which has been influential in designing this research (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1967]), the original proponents of this theory, believed that no literature review should be undertaken before data analysis with the aim of ensuring the researcher was not prejudiced by existing ideas when they approached their data. However, this positivistic attitude, that it is possible to maintain a perspective uncontaminated by prior knowledge, is accepted by Charmaz (2006) as unachievable and undesirable, as will be expanded upon in the next chapter. A review of the literature is included in this research as it is proposed that this is useful in establishing potential areas which could benefit from further study and helping to highlight any potential pitfalls the researcher may face along the way. This review is therefore intended not to provide concepts which the data will be forced into, but rather to 'set the stage' for the later conceptual conclusions that arose from the data.

2.2 Textiles and identification

This section briefly considers relevant debates regarding the nature of identity in order to then apply this conceptualisation to the specific context of textiles and women's lives. The section questions what relationship there is between making and using textiles and the way we communicate a sense of self. The section also asks how textiles might be used by those in power to ensure people conform to desired ways of behaving. The section also explores which

areas of textile production have been studied to a greater or lesser extent in order to begin to establish a gap in current understanding.

2.2.1 Identification

The section introduces the definition of identity which will be used in this research, largely drawing upon the work of Jenkins (2004). Although the term 'identity' has many different conceptualisations, for the purposes of this research identity will be understood as referring to a person's understanding of who they are, what they want from their lives, and how they relate to other people. It may involve personal thoughts and feelings or the adoption of group labels and values.

A further definition of identity is drawn from Jenkins' (2004) work. Jenkins' (2004) definition of identity as a process which might better be termed 'identification' to reflect the evolving and relational nature of our sense of self as we consider how we see ourselves but also how other people view us. Our sense of self, according to Jenkins (2004) is always changing through interactions and is both collective (as we see ourselves as fitting in with others) and individual (as we set ourselves apart from them). This definition was chosen as an explanation which was congruent with a critical realist perspective (developed further in the next chapter) which favours social construction rather than an external reality and an internal true self (Cruickshank, 2003). Additionally, it is a useful conception of identity to apply to knitting, an activity which is both an individual and collective activity built on the interactions between people and between people and objects. This definition of identity as constructed through interactions will also be returned to when discussing active interviewing (Section 3.3.4) and insiderness (Section 3.7).

Thinking about identity also involves setting out something of the balance between individual motivations and societal expectations. If we consider identity to be constituted of both how we see ourselves, how we think other people see us, and how they do view us, we can consider the interaction between individual and cultural values. Jenkins (2004) argues that there are cultural norms and values that shape our identification, i.e. we shape ourselves to articulate or contravene whichever of these norms we choose. This type of individual and collective identity making is based on similarities and differences and can be used to understand how we are both born into existing cultures and how we create our own. Culture, like identity, is therefore socially constructed, edited, and reiterated. Bourdieu (1984) is useful here in providing a conceptual framework for understanding how our individual experiences and identities are affected by the allocation of various forms of capital according to social structures. Yet he also suggests that individuals have the power to change these structures through alteration or refusing to replicate them. Bourdieu (1984) uses the term 'habitus' to describe the continuation through practice of the norms and values belonging to the group of which one is a member.

This conception of identity as relational and ongoing is also relevant to the stance on the nature of truth and reality that was taken in this research, more of which is discussed in Section 3.2. Bell (1999) suggests that seeing identity as performative, created in the moment of an interaction, does not render the task of studying identity impossible or pointless. It could be argued that viewed in this way identity is such a private, unstable position that to attempt to capture it for study would be impossible. However, for identity – our understanding of who we are – to be created through interactions with others there must be some shared language of norms, values and meanings that individuals have some knowledge of in order to communicate. Building again on Bourdieu's (1984) claim that we are both affected by, and can change the habitus of the culture in which we live, reality and truth can be seen as individually constructed but with some 'common sense' understandings. Each individual

has their own understanding of reality and so whilst each person sees the world in a slightly different way there are overlaps in understanding on which to base research such as this. Bell (1999:2) argues that when we conceptualise identity as relational and interactional there remains the question, perhaps even more so than if we view identity as fixed, of how

‘identities continued to be produced, embodied and performed, effectively, passionately and with social and political consequence. In the world, moreover, their appearance keeps the theorist on her toes; forms and modes of subjectivization, identity and affiliation are always complex, often surprising, and apolitically unpredictable.’

It is in this spirit of exploration and openness that the research described in this thesis is conducted.

2.2.2 Textiles and identity

This section will consider what is already known about the role that objects and their production, particularly textiles, play in our lives as being involved in a process of identity formation and communication set out above. Textiles are regularly used in many cultures to distinguish or show allegiance, for example think of a football scarf and a business suit. Part of the motivation behind this study is the suggestion that textiles are ubiquitous and universal, even those who claim not to care what they wear decide what to put on in the morning (Weber and Mitchell, 2004). The myriad of ways cloth can be manipulated, decorated and shaped mean many cultures use it show political and social allegiances (Weiner and Schneider, 1989). Textiles can both reveal and conceal, disguise, distinguish or unite and homogenize. Ash (1996) claims textiles are ‘of’ us rather than just ‘belonging to’ us in that they both represent and affect our experiences, implying a close and interactive relationship. Clothing is perhaps the most apparent textile to be used in identity, showing

for example marriage status (Weiner and Schneider, 1989), and age, class or gender (Ribeiro, 2003). As such, this section suggests that textiles do have a complex relationship to individual identities and societal expectations and is well-researched in the context of clothing and some methods of production such as weaving and embroidery. It therefore could be suggested that knitting might also play a role in identification, however this is less researched at present.

Textiles are involved in our close relationships and evoke powerful responses in touch and smell. We wear textiles against our bodies, sleep wrapped in them, walk on them and, as Turney (2012) discusses, use them in our intimate relationships as acts and symbols of love and evokers of obligation. It could be suggested that the personal nature of many textiles and their ability to provoke responses involving multiple senses mean they are readily used and powerful as parts of extended self. Items such as photographs, often used to create identity and stimulate memories (Stallybrass, 1993; Kuhn, 2002), could be seen as less immediate and in-the-moment than textiles. Photographs can be looked at, perhaps their musty smell or crinkled corners might stimulate sensory responses. However textiles might be exaggerated and intensified memory objects. For example, Banin and Guy (2001) describe the rich responses that were triggered when they interviewed women physically sifting through their wardrobes, actually touching the clothes they were talking about and remembering their significance. The essays collected by Weber and Mitchell (2004) and Dunseath (1998) make use of these stories and show how women use textiles to approach difficult issues concerning gender, identity and relationships from an oblique angle. More recently, Heti et al. (2014) have used clothing as a stimulus to encourage women to reveal personal and emotive stories and thoughts about their identities and relationships. Turney (2004) and Johnson and Wilson (2005) suggest that because knitting is linked with our cultural and social history (real or imagined), and often our personal familial history, it is intimate and associated with parts of our identity.

In addition to an exploration of how people make objects we should also consider how objects make people (Miller, 2010), a suggestion which could be understood using Jenkins' notion of identity produced through interaction. Turney (2012) discusses the power of handmade objects in particular to communicate with other people. Weber and Mitchell (2004) discuss textiles as being 'scaffolding', providing structure to our sense of self. Tseelon (1995, 2001) argues that this structure acts reflexively to help us understand our unique perspective and our cultural setting, meaning they may convey social structures as well as be a tool to change them (Bourdieu, 1984). Further positioning objects as involved in identification as an individual and collective notion, Schultz et al. (1989) argue possessions that perform this function reflect three desires: wanting to fit in with others, wanting to be different to others, and wanting to locate oneself in the past, present and/or future. Viewing objects as both facilitators of communication and shapers of our identity is in keeping with Jenkins' understanding of our identity as both a symptom of the habitus in which we live and an individual negotiation with the values which we choose to perpetuate and those we seek to contravene.

Kruger (2001:26) sums up the important symbolic functions and utility of textiles arguing 'whether we spin fibres or thoughts, human beings participate in a system that clothes society with the fabric of belief as well as the fabric of cloth'. Some of the knitters that informed this research commented on the feeling of the yarn running through their fingers and of seeing grandchildren clothed in their stitches. It has been argued that it is in relation to the body that textiles take on new roles as parts of our identity, echoing themes of intimacy discussed above: 'a textile is a text...so the weave of a textile is what gives it a plot, a narrative, which exists thanks to the contact of the textile on body' (Calefacto, 2004:87).

Internet blogs and social media have created a space where women are identified by their knitting personas and their knitted achievements (Humphreys, 2008). For example, often bloggers will join a group of other bloggers who are all making the same pattern and show their participation by

including a 'button' (a logo) on their blog. Humphreys (2008) describes this as both a way of publicizing the project and also a way of showing your common identity as knitters. On the internet knitting could be used as a way of aligning oneself with a common public identity or lifestyle and the values that are associated with it. While not the focus of this study knitting is also bound up with some knitters' professional identities, with more people being able to sell their products as an additional or main source of income using the internet. Orton-Johnson (2012) explored how a blog and store on Etsy, for example, are now important parts of some women's identities, whether as a way of publicizing their business or as an artistic practice. She discusses how it is important to these women that they have a virtual presence as a 'crafter' (Orton-Johnson, 2012:9).

2.2.3 Gender and textiles

A basic understanding of what is meant by the term 'identity' was set out above and similarly this section takes another term, 'women', from the research aim to briefly explore. This research is not looking at detail in different conceptions of 'women' as a term and it is acknowledged that the participants of this research may themselves have a variety of understandings of their womanhood. However, it is useful to establish, for the purposes of this research what is meant by 'women' and briefly assess its appropriateness as a collective term. The section then widens to discuss the role that textiles have played in women's lives.

The viability of using the term 'women' as a way to describe the multiplicity of experiences of women has been debated (hooks, 2007). It is useful to be cautious when assuming shared experiences between women, however there is empirical evidence that women do tend to share some cultural, social, political and economic experiences which means studying them as a group is viable (Green, 1998). Dilley and Scraton (2010:127) seek in their research to

avoid essentialist applications of the term 'women' by recognising both individual experiences and the impact of social structures, speaking of

'the spaces between structuralist and post-structuralist analyses, focusing on social positioning as well as 'everyday' individual experiences, retaining an emphasis on difference but going beyond plurality and diversity.'

Gill and Scharff (2011:2) offer an alternative tactic, suggesting we speak of femininities instead of one homogenised femininity in order to find 'a way of highlighting the *social production and construction of gender* and avoiding essentialism' (italics in original).

By conducting research which considers both individual agency and social expectations the researcher can arguably develop a deeper understanding by exploring the negotiation between these value systems. Francombe (2014:581) describes research of this type as '*holding together* the structural and the agentic in often multifaceted and competing ways' (italics in the original). If, as discussed in the previous section, individual identities can be affected by dominant ways of behaving that are encouraged within the habitus, and if some textiles can be seen as physical manifestations of identity, telling stories to and about us, then they could also be described as being physical manifestations of cultural traditions.

Historically, women's textile production, other than industrial and large scale, took place in or around the home. This is not an apolitical space, but has been viewed by commentators as a place of oppression, trapping women inside a feminine ideal, however recent research has instead presented a more complex reading of the domestic sphere as a site of negotiation rather than a fixed ideal (Buckley, 1999; Parker, 2010 [1984]). Indeed, Johnson and Lloyd (2004) urge us to move on from a definitive rejection of the notion of the 'housewife', arguing that not to do so ensures the continued de-valuation of home life. They call for us to reassess 'what the domains of work and home might mean to offer us as women' rather than privilege outside paid work as

the source of identity (Johnson and Lloyd, 2004:viii). Johnson and Lloyd argue that our homes remain important sites where we articulate the individuality of our identities and foster important relationships. However, the interpretation of activities done in the home remain complex to interpret. For example Furst (1997) found that although many women thought it was their responsibility as a mother to cook, they welcomed the task rather than passively adopting it as feminine behaviour. Hackney (1999) agrees that being a woman, being feminine, however we conceptualise these terms, can be important to our sense of self and value in addition to being potentially oppressive. The current popularity of knitting as a leisure activity is discussed in Section 1.4.

The research only looks at women, however this is not to assume that men do not knit, for example a recent book of patterns aimed at men is entitled 'Knitting with Balls' (Del Vecchio, 2006) and Fougner's (2014 [1972]) *The Manly Art of Knitting* has recently been reprinted. Men and women have had different relationships with textile production, including knitting, in terms of allocation of jobs, income, and cultural meanings. It is difficult to establish the gendered history of knitting. However, the tendency for greater physical strength in men and the child bearing responsibilities of women mean that in most cultures women were responsible for making textiles as an activity congruent with their other domestic responsibilities (Wayland Barber, 1996). The relationship between women and textile production is ideological as well as practical. For example, Parker (2010 [1984]) has influentially traced the relationship between embroidery and femininity. She describes embroidery as socialising women into meek, subservient feminine ideals where a woman's value was judged by their physical appearance, moral fibre and caring ability. However, Parker (2010 [1984]) and authors such as Goggin (2002) also demonstrate how textile production can be used to challenge these ideals.

The habitus of a culture, patterns of behaviour and belief, may seem fixed and unchanging to us but are actually made up of 'invented traditions' which require maintenance through repetition (Hobsbawm, 1983; Bourdieu, 1984; Rowley, 1999). Butler (2004) has argued how gender only exists through a

performance of repetition and modification. Failure to repeat or transmit culture creates a space for creativity and resistance. Textiles are a vehicle for 'establishing, homogenizing and perpetuating' these traditions (Kruger, 2001:21). Traces of the previous importance of production techniques to our culture remain despite our becoming increasingly separated from their production (Jacob, 2007). Kruger (2001) and Livingstone and Ploof (2007) suggest the continued existence of metaphors such as 'a stitch in time saves nine', 'spinning a yarn' and 'the distaff side of the family' illustrate that in the past, knowledge of textile techniques was widespread and culturally and socially important.

Authors such as Protash et al. (2012) argue that by looking at textile production we can make visible some of the negotiations and regulations surrounding femininity. Textiles have been a key way women have performed their femininity or others have controlled this performance. The relationship between objects such as textiles or techniques such as knitting and societal expectations can be 'common knowledge' to such an extent that they become invisible and therefore unchallenged (Kuhn, 2002). For example, Kirkham and Attfield (1996) discuss the taboo of dressing male babies in pink. This seemingly harmless or 'normal' tradition could instead be interpreted as reflecting deep-seated homophobia. Kirkham and Attfield suggest that gendered objects inform social relations in all areas of daily life. Given that textiles are deeply intertwined with femininity, as discussed above, it could be argued that they play a powerful role as gendered objects perpetuating, or giving the individual the potential to disrupt, accepted gender roles. By interrogating and presenting everyday life as complex and potentially significant, rather than simple and banal, there is the possibility of new understandings and the challenge of assumptions (MacInnis and Leeman, 2007). This implies that researchers who examine the everyday with imagination and criticality have the potential to understand the traditions governing the everyday and some individual concerns.

This section has established an historical relationship between femininity and textile production. Knitting may still retain some of the connotations of domesticity that it had in the past, whether real or idealised. Parkins (2004) suggests celebrities mobilise historical connotations of knitting as domestic and homely in order to present themselves as 'normal', accessible and unthreatening in an effort to increase their popularity. Furthermore, she argues celebrity couples use knitting to invoke a 'heteronormative rubric of marriage with its ideals of gift giving and shared hobbies' (Parkins, 2004:428). These assertions are based on the assumption that historical norms and values have the potential to inform the ways that knitting is viewed today. Jefferies (2001:4) suggests the past, or more importantly our perception of the past, is relevant as looking at the past is one way we understand our present, '[h]ow the past is seen, told and narrated, grasped as memory and bodily shifts recognises the primacy of textiles in the construction of knowledge and cultural production'. Knitting is described as a 'material referent', a way to connect with previous generations of women who knitted and a slower way of life where practical skills were passed between family members and there was a strong sense of community (Abrams, 2006:152; Myzelev, 2009). Whether this is a naïve ideal or a valuable way of reassessing the values of modern capitalist society is complex.

2.3 Contemporary knitting in academic discourse

This section looks at how contemporary knitting has been understood in academic literature. Within academic discourse knitting is established as a process through which meaning is communicated. The next two parts examine a key debate surrounding whether knitting today is 'new', rebranded as a tool for social change, or alternatively if it is unchanged, either always bearing this subversive potential or now a problematic new tool of patriarchy. The section

ends by considering the relationships knitting makes or the exclusions it creates.

The literature in this chapter, other than in the first section, was identified using two strategies, a broad literature review aimed at accessing a range of relevant literature on a variety of topics such as identity, femininity and textiles, and a subsequent narrower review looking in particular at academic discourse surrounding knitting that was published within the last ten years and concerned with Europe or America. This selection of texts was explored using QSR*NVivo, qualitative analysis software, in order to sort it into themes. These themes shaped this chapter, but also led to methodological observations, discussed in the next. Within the narrower literature review some of the most frequent words identified using the QSR*NVivo software were, as to be expected, 'knitting', 'craft', 'textile' and 'art'. Other frequent words included 'culture', 'social', 'people', 'feminist', 'public' and 'members' (as in knitting group members), implying that knitting is often talked about in a wider public and social context. However, also frequently appearing words were 'domestic', 'traditional' and 'work'. This might indicate that authors remain aware of traditional connotations of knitting. That authors frequently use the term 'movement' may indicate that they are referring to knitting as a politically driven and collective action.

2.3.1 Meaningful making

This section explores how knitting might tell stories to and for the knitter, exist in the context of potentially meaningless consumption, and have therapeutic benefits. Turney (2009) suggests that it is only since the 1980s that literature has considered the meaning as well as the practicalities of textile production. It could be argued that this body of scholarship was simulated by Parker's (2010 [1984]) seminal work examining the role of needlework in creating, reaffirming, and challenging patriarchal feminine ideals. More recently Turney

(2009) has followed suit, examining knitting as producing culture. Both authors have argued that this history has been largely overlooked by academics in the past due to textile production being seen as simple, mundane, and of low cultural significance.

Knitting and knitted objects can be a way of expressing self, involved in the interactions which form our identities (Jenkins, 2004). Goggin and Tobin (2009) similarly theorise the interaction between people and objects as a 'rhetoric praxis', involved in the formation of identity and repetition of cultural norms and values. Both the process of knitting and the knitted product can be viewed as holding personal and social meanings. Johnson and Wilson (2005) describe hand knitted objects as 'symbols of self', physical manifestations of the knitter's memories, aspirations and values. Turney (2012:302) develops this idea referring to knitting as containing 'intimate forms of object relations' used to 'construct personal narratives'.

Knitting is a way that makers can express their individuality and style and allow them to cater to individual preferences and requirements (Chansky, 2010). Johnson and Wilson (2005) expand on this idea of knitting as self-expression to argue that the very process of physically making something by hand encourages alternative sensory and bodily ways of knowing, and therefore is self-expression even when done from a pattern designed by someone else. They also argue that knitting is particularly suited for women to express their individuality as it is, because of its perceived lowly status compared to fine art, less susceptible to aesthetic or value judgements. Therefore they suggest that women feel less threatened and apprehensive about being 'good enough' and instead can express their creativity freely. This perspective could however be criticised as patronising women. Making something unique challenges practices of mindless consumerism and articulates individual agency (Williams, 2011). Bratich and Brush (2011) argue that if we understand craft as executing our power to act then it can therefore be seen as activist and cunning or 'crafty'.

Knitting is increasingly being viewed as having therapeutic benefits, for example the recent publications by Corkhill (2014) and Gant (2015). Chansky (2010:695) suggests knitting, as the 'new yoga', is a newly fashionable way to take time away from our busy and technologically mediated lives. Myzelev (2009) argues knitting is therefore equated with the luxury of free time and a reward for surviving everyday life. Women have been found to use knitting to improve their mood or maintain a sense of well-being (Futterman Collier, 2011). Rill et al. (2013) claim knitting improves people's happiness levels because it produced something functional, was a way to express oneself, and because it could lead to increased social contact. These authors (Futterman Collier, 2011; Rill et al., 2013) concluded knitting should be considered as treatment to reduce anxiety, for example, and Clave-Brule et al. (2009) have explored the potential for knitting to help treat people with eating disorders. Speaking from personal experience, Fisk (2012:162) discusses how knitting was a way for her to 'become at home in the world, when depression made me want to leave the world'.

Rebmann (2008) reflects on the empowerment that both she, as a first year Masters in Social Work student, and the women she was working with on her placement, achieved through knitting together. It may be easy to romanticise making as empowering for the maker without offering practical examples and evidence. For example, it is uncertain what statements such as 'the production of the items brought meaning to the women' mean in practice (Johnson and Wilson, 2005). Rebmann (2008) tackles this, by suggesting that knitting was successful in empowering her and the group of women because it is both a communal and individual achievement that they learnt to knit and the group could increasingly rely on each other rather than her for support; it facilitated trust and dialogue about other issues; and knitting was a creative activity that the group had initiated themselves rather than an activity which had been decided without their input. As a social worker she also found facilitating the group's knitting made her feel better about herself and her performance. This example provides evidence of how knitting can be used to effect the well-being

of an individual and of a group. However, unusually Rebmann (2008) points to an element of risk in taking up knitting as there is the potential to fail and experience lack of confidence or a negative self-image.

Although this research focuses on knitting by hand rather than mass-produced knitting, capitalist consumerism remains relevant due to the market for expensive yarns and brand name needles. Knitting itself as a type of production could be a form of materialism, albeit one far from the fast-fashion of the high street. Much of the discussion in this chapter is based on the assumption that knitting and knitted objects remain meaningful despite connections with mass production and consumerism, but this is not an uncontested area. Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) argue that we are encouraged to think that we will reach our 'true' selves or potential through consumption, including acquiring the latest fashions and the ideal physical appearance. They make a direct link between contemporary femininity and commerce as a meaningless and degrading activity, and hooks (2007) has similarly suggested we just want 'things', rather than objects which are meaningful or beautiful.

Orton-Johnson (2012) and Pentney (2008) are similarly concerned that knitting has become a part of 'individualistic apolitical consumption' due to its potential for distinction rather than integration. Groenevald (2010:269) states that knitting is now completely 'enmeshed' with the world of consumption and production and therefore should not be idealised as environmentally and ethically superior. What is bought as local wool may have been sent elsewhere for spinning, for example (Williams, 2011). Knitting may actually 'celebrate consumption and fetishism' and there may be a tendency in the literature to 'overstate the political' elements (Orton-Johnson, 2012:4). These arguments imply indiscriminate acquisition but the studies discussed in this chapter suggest people do still put thought and care into the objects they make from equipment and materials they have, largely, bought. Banin and Guy (2001) point out that women's consumption can be overlooked by academic research

that dismisses women's possessions as indicative of the excesses of consumerism rather than credible parts of identification (Grazia, 1996).

Knitting is a process which both takes place in private and in collective settings such as in public spaces and knitting groups. Additionally, knitters can make for themselves or to give away, further enhancing relationships with objects (Turney, 2012) and identification through interaction (Jenkins, 2004). Wattanasuwan (2009) argues that objects have no intrinsic meaning, they only tell stories in an interaction between the object and a person, comparable to Jenkins' (2004) suggestion that identity only has meaning through interaction, and consistent with a critical realist perspective (discussed further in the next chapter). Wattanasuwan (2005) suggests objects are a route to belonging by building connections with other people. This research discusses how knitting as a process and as an object can bridge the gap and facilitate conversation between women, other women, society, and me as a researcher.

2.3.2 New knitting?

This section considers literature which suggests knitting is now 'new', progressive and has broken free from the shackles of domestic drudgery and patriarchal oppression. Literature is discussed that portrays knitting as a tool to call for social change, a way to explore what it means to be a woman today, and to disrupt traditional uses of space, experiences of time, and power relations. Craft, Rowley (1999) argues, is an ideal way to show the possibilities of social improvement as it can reference history and use a 'language' we understand whilst not being restricted by the more structured format of traditions that might contain disciplines such as fine art.

Pentney (2008: n.p.) expressed concern that academia was not exploring contemporary knitting in enough depth, overlooking how it might act 'as a vehicle for academic and mainstream conversations about gender, art, cultural

products, and work and capital'. This has to some extent been answered by authors such as Carpenter (2010) and Scheuing (2010), studying knitting as an activist or political activity, and Springgay (2010) considering alternative ways of learning, knowing and interacting using knitting in the classroom. Knitting has been associated with action for 'purposeful social change' (Pentney, 2008:n.p.) such as protest regarding sweated labour (Bratich and Brush, 2011), the homogenisation of cultures (Carpenter, 2010), and the planned obsolescence of commodities (Winge and Stamp, 2013), and isolation in a global technological society and terrorism (Manahan and Wolfram Cox, 2007). Although these examples tend to focus on collective and public action, Carpenter (2010:3) highlights how even small acts done in private can be activist, 'whilst it might seem trite to claim to be saving the world by sewing a button on your shirt, it becomes a political act when 1000s of shirts are thrown into landfill simply because they are missing the very same button'.

Chansky (2010) has traced the changing relationship between the feminist movement and textile crafts such as knitting. Chansky (2010) suggests that when marginalised groups aim for equality they tend to first reject the outward symbols of difference, in this case textile crafts. However third wave feminists, Chansky argues, then reclaimed textile work as a subtle tool for activism, for example 'yarn bombing', and an overt way to shock viewers, for example embroidery by the artist Tracy Emin. Myzelev (2009) argues there has now been a complete 'resignification' of textiles under the umbrella of a 'new domesticity'. This rejection of old values can be seen in titles such as 'Anti-craft' (Rigdon & Stewart, 2007). At the same time as knitting references the past with traditional patterns etc. it is also distanced from the past and presented as 'revitalised and repackaged...as hip and fun' (Myzelev, 2009).

The adoption of knitting as a tool for activism may, Scheuing (2010:2) suggests, be due to its unthreatening appearance, it does 'not speak loudly', making it an effective way to discuss controversial topics in a non-combative way. Knitting, especially when used in humorous ways, can negotiate anger or embarrassment as barriers to public discussion (Winge and Stalp, 2013) and

raise awareness by being placed in unexpected situations (Williams, 2011). Knitting is explored as a force for social change because of its potential to reflect on the past and look forwards into the future, projecting an alternative for society (Fisk, 2012). Additionally, Springgay et al. (2010) found members of a university 'knitivism' (**knitting activism**) group said it was the process of knitting rather than the outcome that was activist, for example the group held 'knit-ins' to draw attention to social issues. Williams (2011) and Pentney (2008) link third wave feminist knitting with the Riot Grrrl movement. Both promote a do-it-yourself aesthetic, humour and irony, creativity of the masses rather than the artistically educated, and word of mouth (online and offline) promotion of goods within an alternative marketplace. However, we should also be aware of the potential for academic comment to encourage the politicisation of knitting through the use of terminology such as a knitting 'revolution', feminist 'reclamation' and describing knitters as 'crafty' people.

This democratisation of culture and media has been linked with widening the awareness and accessibility of knitting as a tool to draw attention to or offer alternatives to traditional gender roles. Myzelev (2009) understands 'new domesticity' as an arena in which women can freely express these identities. Knitting instructional books use irony and humour to promote knitting in unusual ways with titles such as 'Not tonight darling, I'm knitting' (Hosegood, 2006) and '*Naughty Knits*' (Lohr, 2007). The influential 'Stitch n' Bitch' (Stoller, 2012) series of books have spawned many knitting groups with similar names. Turney (2012) interprets such work as being potentially subversive by embracing connotations of craft such as sentimentality and kitsch to undermine notions of traditional femininity. Chansky (2010:698) argues that the communities built around knitting offer a 'safe and comforting arena, perhaps our only true means of expressing the dichotomy of being a modern woman'. As knitting has been adopted as a non-threatening tool to intervene in public spaces in activities such as 'yarn bombing', perhaps in a similar way knitting can be used as a 'safe' site in which to explore personal issues.

Although knitting was done in public as well as in the home our imagined history of knitting often comes with a domestic backdrop. Groeneweld (2010) argues that knitting can be used to disrupt the status quo as a traditionally domestic activity taken into public spaces such as pubs and cafés. Bratich and Brush (2011:237) believe that knitting in public ‘inevitably...[makes] this question of space an explicitly gendered one’. Bratich and Brush (2011) and Orson-Johnson (2013) argue that knitting increases women’s online participation, a traditionally masculine domain. Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007:10) comment that knitting is a ‘unique cyber-feminist phenomenon’, linking knitting with issues such as gender inequality, the hegemony of globalisation, global fashion and mass production, and anti-violence protests.

Contrastingly, knitting might be used to look backwards in order to present an option for a better future, reminiscing about stronger communities, less technology, and simpler lives. Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007) suggest some knitting is today done out of a nostalgic desire to return to this lifestyle. The past is presented as worry-free, relaxed and simple, an ‘unproblematized ‘post-9/11’ return to domesticity’ in contrast to today as focused on progression and competition and so without time for leisure (Groeneweld, 2010:267). Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007) also argue some knitting is undertaken with irony and an acknowledgement much of this imagined past is idealised rather than a reality. Winge and Stalp (2013) have also commented on the humour present in some modern textile crafts. Women have more equality in Western societies than ever before and therefore, Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007:17) suggest, have ‘little to resist’. In this case, the authors continue, their taking up of knitting may be playful and ironic, mimicking those who look nostalgically on the past, rather than being an act of resistance or revolution.

There is some discussion in the literature about the simple pleasure in making things. Busch (2013:11) compares knitting to Pirsig’s portrayal of motorcycling in *‘Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance’* to explain the way that both are ‘about being present’. Busch (2013:11) quotes Pirsig’s (2006) description of working with one’s hands as ‘being in the scene, not just watching’. Possibly

more problematic is the notion that women need a way of making an intervention in their world, for example Johnson and Wilson (2005:115) assert knitting offers 'women an opportunity to identify their place in the world'. It is perhaps taking this statement too literally, but the authors could be accused of portraying women as worryingly passive without a vehicle to express themselves. Where Busch's (2013) narrative seems empowering, there may also be the potential to present knitting as a prop rather than tool for women to experience a sense of empowerment.

Myzelev (2009) suggests that knitting can be used to escape our fast-paced and technologically mediated lifestyles and instead work in a slow, steady and repetitious manner. Knitting therefore 'reveals alternatives to mass production, introducing jarring anachronisms akin to the Amish buggy on a highway' (Bratich and Brush, 2011: 236). We return to knitting as a potential collective action – drawing viewers into political debate, and a personal action – affecting one's own perception of time and choosing to withdraw from the speed set by modern life. Williams (2011:309) describes contemporary knitting as a movement that 'acknowledges but updates the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity'.

Knitting can also be used to disrupt power relations, as Turney (2012) suggests in her examination of the knitted jumper as a gift. Turney describes this gift as providing power to the previously powerless, the female knitter, when she gives it the previously powerful, the male receiver. By knitting a jumper she is staking her claim on him, manipulating him, and saying 'I made you this, so you should love me back.' She portrays an individual act of knitting as charged with the power to ensnare, manipulate, empower and, in the case of the Christmas jumper given from older woman to younger man, emasculate and ridicule. Springgay (2010:116) discusses using knitting to change how we think, 'to disrupt the normative ways that students shared and discussed common readings and other class-related texts' by disrupting the usual perceived hierarchy of rational ways of knowing over embodied ways of learning and thinking.

It is notable that the literature discussed above looks at the use of knitting to promote social change, but few researchers examine the reception of this form of activism. The extent to which knitters and crafters, outside of the vocal minority or academic comment, attach a political motivation to their making is questioned by Groeneveld (2010:268) who says makers 'rarely articulate their own interest in DIY crafts as a kind of political orientation'. It is useful to bear in mind that as some literature overlooks the simple pleasure in knitting as a motivation and prefers political explanations, likewise we should not do the reverse and assume that knitting for pleasure excludes any possible additional political considerations (Groeneveld, 2010).

2.3.3 Old knitting or old values?

This section evaluates literature which suggests knitting is not rebranded, as above, or that it has always been used in subversive ways. Knitting as activism has been portrayed as unique to the recent revival, however Carpenter (2010:n.p) points out that '[e]ach generation has its radical crafters'. For example, Chansky (2010) and Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007) highlight how knitting today resembles the Arts and Crafts Movement in sharing the intention to ensure the survival of craft skills through local, handmade, quality products. However, they do not believe this makes knitters retrogressive, rather that knitting embraces 'traditional craft skills and yarns as well as the optical fibre and twisted pair cable used for telecommunications' (Minahan and Wolfram Cox, 2007: 6).

Groeneveld (2010) questions the language of revolution and reclamation which dominates some academic and instructional knitting literature questioning who or what knitting needs reclaiming from. Much of the literature in this area overlooks women who never left knitting for whom it has never needed to be reclaimed – it was always 'theirs'. There is potential to explore further how these women interact with the 'new domesticity' movement and

the increasing visibility of knitting paralleled with a potential increasing exclusivity.

There is the potential when presenting a 'reclamation' or 'resignification' of domestic textile production to inadvertently misrepresent the women who knitted and stitched in the past. The natural contrast of exciting and political uses of textiles today might be to picture the past as stuffy and dull before being transformed by modern feminists. This overlooks the history of women using textile production for valuable and engaging purposes, not least keeping their family warm. Barnett (1995) talks of this as a form of 'amnesia' which simplifies a complex history, overlooks individual agency and prefers a history of textiles as authentic and pure rather than used, dirty, discarded, political, necessary or frivolous. A discourse which only sees textile production as starkly different before and after a feminist rebranding overlooks, for example, women such as Jessie Newbery and Ann Macbeth who taught traditional needlework techniques at the Glasgow School of Art at the beginning of the twentieth century. Through challenging the largely male staff and student population of art education they improved the prospects for young women teachers in the area and could be understood as political despite the 'quaint' and traditional nature of their output (Elliot and Helland, 2002). This discussion also raises the issue that women's textile production might simultaneously reinforce and undermine established gender roles by taking place in a traditionally feminine space that also takes advantage of its own marginality (Elliot and Helland, 2002; Parker, 2010 [1984]). Hamlyn (2012) suggests that it is by occupying both conservative and radical positions that making textiles can have subversive potential. Similarly, Abrams' (2006) comprehensive oral history research on Shetland has demonstrated how female islanders engaged in the public economic arena through their knitting, and that a female culture was developed around knitting and the relationships between knitters that for a considerable length of time part funded the island community before the oil boom in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Abrams reminds us to remain aware of the multifaceted and regional histories of knitting.

Myzelev points out that contemporary knitting is distanced from knitting in the past through phrases such as 'not your grandma's knitting' (Queen and O'Connell, 2014:1). Knitting is presented as new and exciting, seemingly at the expense of older women who are presented as 'the antithesis of 'cool'' (Groeneveld, 2010:272). This attitude, Groeneveld argues, demonstrates an ignorance of how previous generations and older women have and do knit in ways that serve a similar purpose to younger and more recent knitters. Knitting is not always described as "old' media' and should instead, Bratich and Brush (2011) argue, be viewed as changing our views of what both old and new media are and mean. They assert that, as craft is the making of something new from existing (or old) materials, so is the modern knitting movement making new meanings or revising past ones. They say that knitting is now 'thoroughly mediated' by technology and therefore implicitly refashions knitting's history. That knitting does exist online also may not necessarily mean it does not maintain some of the same 'old' meanings simply repeated in a different arena. Whilst this review of literature has discussed the internet as a 'third space' blurring the boundaries between public and private and therefore an empowering space for women, there is also a digital divide between genders and between the wealthy and poor. Bratich and Brush (2011) support their argument about the revolutionary power of knitting to change meanings belonging to the past. They suggest that 'innovation itself changes: now it can mean recrafting the material, unravelling a product to start again, or reworking the same material differently (Bratich and Brush, 2011:250). Bratich and Brush (2011) argue that small acts of problem solving such as reworking areas of a jumper that had worn through were innovative and to not acknowledge this is to overlook a great history of women's everyday creativity.

Contrasting with the idea that textile making has undergone a resignification Lippard (2012:288) suggests that women who take up crafts want to produce art but find an 'excuse' within traditional gender roles which position the maker as male, by making something useful. She says textile production is 'coming back into middle- and upper-class fashion on the apron strings of feminism and

fad' and that this 'fashionable downward mobility' is a response to boredom (Lippard, 2012:288). Whilst this view could be criticised as patronising, it is useful in asking us to think about popular culture with further critical scrutiny. Carpenter (2010:n.p.) refers to the narrative of choice as an 'artificial liberation' being sold back to women which actually serves to reinforce traditional gender roles and mask continuing inequalities. If we continue to code making textiles as inherently feminine and 'reify' traditional gender roles, then we are possibly only reinforcing women's marginal positions within the arts, leisure, and work, continuing to associate women with reproduction and retro-femininity (Chansky, 2010; Williams, 2011:314). However, Bratich and Brush (2011) disagree that reclaiming knitting actually reinforces traditional gender inequalities. They argue that rather than bringing these inequalities into the present, contemporary knitters are demonstrating that knitting has always been a symbol of both women's subservient position in the home *and* her empowered and vital contribution to her family, community and culture.

2.3.4 Knitting and social inclusion and exclusion

This section considers debates surrounding the use of knitting to build relationships but also the potential that it excludes sections of society. The structural properties of textiles lend themselves to comparisons to our social relationships. For example, Kruger (2001) comments that the weaving, tying and looping involved in the construction of textiles means they are easily adopted as symbols for the creation and maintenance of social ties. Culture or society itself is often referred to as a 'fabric', 'woven' or 'shot through'. Just as objects generally can facilitate interactions between people, textiles are particularly suited to this use as their physical properties reflect social experiences in a metaphorical manner.

Turney (2012) suggests that the gift of a handmade jumper can be understood as a declaration of love to make the receiver feel good, a 'hug' which does not

break taboos surrounding physical contact. Handmade gifts are associated with the 'personal touch' (Bratich and Brush, 2011:246) which 'Says You Really Care' (Johnson and Wilson, 2005). Turney (2012:305) discusses how we invest handmade gifts with more significance than shop bought because it has a 'deliberate inbuilt human quality, which distances it from all other things'. Imperfections and oddities symbolise the maker and become sentimentalised. Turney discusses mid-20th century magazines which encouraged young women to knit gifts for potential suitors to demonstrate their domestic skills. Recent titles such as *Never knit your man a sweater unless you've got the ring* (Durant, 2007) may indicate knitted gifts remain a site for the continuation of traditional gender roles in romantic and familial relationships (Turney, 2012).

There is an element of risk in giving a handmade present in which has been invested a considerable amount of time and effort. Were the receiver to dislike the gift the relationship might be harmed rather than improved. As Turney (2012) points out touch is the only reciprocal sense as to be touched is to touch, therefore a handmade gift, which has been so touched by the maker is inherently reciprocal- expecting something from the receiver. Gifts can also play a role in defining the relationship and a handmade gift that has too much or too little time or resources invested in it, when the giver has wrongly defined the relationship, can also cause problematic situations (Johnson and Wilson, 2005; Mauss 2010 [1954]).

Knitting groups seem increasingly common and an example of knitting as a 'communitarian leisure' activity (Minahan and Wolfram Cox, 2007:8) and form of relationship building 'peer-to-peer textiling' (Bratich and Brush, 2011:245). Prigoda and McKenzie (2007) found that members of knitting groups engaged in 'backstage talk', about families, jobs, and holidays, in addition to knitting-related conversation. However, knitters deliberately avoided topics judged too personal, controversial or upsetting. Similarly Wei (2004) found knitting bloggers posted news about family, pets and work as well as their knitting. Contrastingly, although Stannard and Sanders' (2015) recent observation of a knitting group generated social interactions as a key motivation, they attributed

this to receiving technical support and do not mention other social benefits or support. Orton-Johnson (2012:9) found that forums on Ravelry contained a wide variety of non-knitting related topics 'from high risk pregnancies to Harry Potter fandom'. The internet has facilitated knitters to develop communities of like-minded people who they may not otherwise have met (Humphreys, 2008; Myzelev, 2009). There are some crochet blogs, but it is knitting that dominates the internet and offline groups of textile makers where they can 'weave alliances and relationships' (Bratich and Brush, 2011:242). Wei (2004) found 60% of the knitting blogs she studied contained links to other sites, thus publicising the community. Humphreys (2008:424) demonstrates, using the blog 'Yarn Harlot' as a case study, how blogs can be 'creative, interesting aesthetically, and instrumental socially, building community ties'. Knitting has the potential therefore to increase well-being through social interaction and change behaviour to make us more community-minded. In addition to targeting social isolation Humphreys (2008) suggests knitting groups challenge dominant notions of creative achievement which tend to focus on a single artistic genius working alone and set apart from society.

Knitting can be a way to feel connected even when done alone as a way for women to connect with their 'foremothers with a sense of pride' (Chansky, 2010:685) and pass on 'purls of wisdom' to future generations (Prigoda and McKenzie, 2007:90). Knitting is a tacit manifestation of connectivity, perhaps attractive in a world where many connections are virtual and intangible (Springgay, 2010). Owning textiles from the past, such as a family christening gown, can create a sense of continuity or familial bond, and represent a reassuringly cyclical pattern of life and death. Knitters may not have items made by their mothers or grandmothers, but they can retain and bequeath the ability to knit. Referring specifically to Shetland, but perhaps applicable elsewhere, Abrams (2006:149) describes how knitting 'occupied a central place in the web of female relationships...helping to create a female culture' that could be passed on to future generations.

Knitting instructional books seem to frequently contain patterns which reference their historical credentials as markers of quality. Authors such as Fisk (2012) and Myzelev (2009:148) talk of the process of knitting as a 'conceptual link' and way to connect with both the women of the past and their way of life. Myzelev (2009) uses Anderson's (2006) concept of national consciousness to discuss how 'imagined communities' are maintained through fostering a shared linear and, often, pastoral premodern history. Similarly, Humphreys (2008:430) argues online communities surrounding knitting are 'imagined into being' through shared experiences and patterns of behaviour. Bratich and Brush (2011:234) assert that the increased popularity of knitting groups is motivated by a desire to revive 'the ability to produce community through production and distribution of the object' which had previously been 'captured by capital' during the industrial revolution.

There may be barriers to participation in knitting as a communitarian activity, for example Nelson et al. (2005) and Parkins (2004) suggest many women have to squeeze their creative activities into free time in between other commitments. Textile artists interviewed in Nelson et al.'s study said they chose sewing and knitting rather than painting, for example, precisely because they could pick it up and put it down quickly to attend to other work and family life. Many of these women eventually built studios in their gardens in order to physically remove themselves from the family space in order to avoid interruption. It has been argued by Nelson et al. that the responsibility of raising a family and doing housework is still associated with women rather than men, and therefore it may be that some women are using knitting as a means of creative expression because it fits around their lifestyles and family commitments in a way that some men need not consider when choosing a creative leisure activity. Private spaces and leisure time are implicitly gendered as spaces outside paid work as they are the arenas where women have traditionally been responsible for the majority of care giving towards their family, their home and their community, the 'immediacy of the demands of care may make the reorganization of time demands difficult if not impossible'

(Parkins, 2004). However, we may be experiencing a 'rebranding' of knitting which seeks to separate it from family responsibilities and instead associate it with a period of time set aside for oneself (Parkins, 2004). The popularity of knitting groups, which tend to be outside the home, may be a part of this new knitting.

Groeneveld (2010) highlights the potential for 'cupcake feminism', 'new domesticity', and contemporary knitting to be exclusive. She points out that feminism is in a difficult position, balanced 'at a politically ambiguous nexus of privilege, complicity, and resistance' Groeneveld (2010:259). Knitting, like dressmaking and other currently popular crafts, requires some surplus capital. Although needing less extensive equipment than dressmaking, for example, there is a vast range of luxury yarns and expensive needles available. Mass produced knitting from high street stores are almost always cheaper than making a comparable garment oneself. As one of Springgay et al.'s (2011:608) interview subjects said knitting 'is a white middle-class hobby... a luxury that many women cannot afford.' Myzelev (2009:153) argues that the knitting 'revolution' has transformed knitting from part of the habitus of the working classes to a symbol of middle class conspicuous leisure and consumption. Minahan and Wolfram Cox (2007) point out that the internet is largely a space populated with young, white people with an income, see Section 8.4 for more discussion of capital and knitting. These concerns lead Groeneveld to question whether knitting and the feminist movement more generally are too exclusive to speak for and to women across social groups. This calls for us to consider 'what is to be gained and lost from the exclusion of certain groups from contemporary crafting discourse' (Groeneveld, 2010:265).

2.3.5 Studying textiles

This section discusses the approaches other authors have used to study knitting and other textile techniques in order to inform the design of this

research, discussed in the next Chapter. Approaches in textile research range from archival (Breward, 1999) to oral history (Burman, 1999) to interdisciplinary, involving methods such as interviews and the analysis of secondary materials (Turney, 2012). To aid discussion and comparison here, key literature has been grouped into categories, although it is recognised these are overlapping and simplified. These categories are discussed in turn and include discussion pieces, qualitative research, quantitative research, and historically informed research.

Discussion pieces include thought experiments such as the article by Busch (2013) which presents a new approach to existing knowledge and personal pieces such as that by Thakkar (2008) who uses a possession to stimulate memories and discussion. The majority of texts identified in the focused literature search, see the introduction to were sorted into this category. These types of articles are useful in that they present avenues for future research and provoke new debates. Other discussion articles fall between traditional research-based pieces and thought pieces in that they evidence their argument using, for example, extracts from instructional books (Myzelev, 2009) or craftivist events (Humphreys, 2008). Although the space constraints of a journal article format might lead authors to omit methodological details, Turney (2004) demonstrates how they can be included in this format without sacrificing space for discussion. Articles which do not discuss methodology, or only partially do so, are potentially problematic if one chooses to assess the quality of the articles as pieces of social research. We should, however, be wary of judging different types of research against the same criteria. The utility of this work arguably lies in being creative and thought provoking responses to an issue, and therefore a valid contribution to the current state of knowledge. However there remains space for future research which seeks to explore these issues in an empirical way using social research techniques.

I categorised literature as qualitative research where description of this methodology was present. These tended to utilise small sample sizes such as 18 (Johnson and Wilson, 2005) and 25 respondents (Nelson et al., 2005).

These studies focus on detailed explorations of the phenomenon and the sampling was often opportunistic and drawn from knowledgeable groups, for example Nelson et al. (2005) interviewed textile artists who happened to be taking part in an exhibition and Johnson and Wilson (2005) attracted participants by knitting in public places and attending knitting events. An opportunity or volunteer sample is advantageous as respondents are likely to be passionate and involved with knitting and happy to give informative responses, however the findings should not be viewed as representative of the general population. Often research in this category used interviews (Johnson and Wilson, 2005; Nelson et al., 2005), participant observation (Prigoda and McKenzie, 2007) or combinations of these methods (Springgay et al., 2010). Observation is useful in allowing the researcher to see what participants do as well as what they say they do. It should not be assumed, however, that this is entirely 'naturally occurring' as it is likely the researcher's presence will affect the behaviour of their subjects. The advantages and limitations of being an 'insider' in the world that you are studying is discussed in Section 3.7.

The literature does not frequently use quantitative approaches, understandable in the context of a subject which is complex and nuanced and not readily problematized or quantified. For some researchers, such as Clave-Brule et al. (2009) who assessed the potential for knitting to help patients suffering from anorexia, it was useful to collect qualitative information on how patients were feeling and then quantify their responses in order to assess the extent to which they could argue the area was worthy of further trialling and research. For Futterman Collier (2012) this approach allowed her to access a large sample of 821 people, far outside the practical reaches of the interviewer, through self-administered questionnaires where participants were asked to numerically rate concepts such as skill and well-being. Her conclusions could then be generalised to make wider claims about women's textile making. However, this approach does not capture the details of individual experience and relies on the strength of the measurement instruments in accurately conveying and capturing information to respondents and researcher.

Historical analysis as a category of the literature can overlap with some of the above categories, but it was useful here to isolate this literature to examine the insight it gives to determine if contemporary research could benefit from, or requires, an historical awareness. Knitting today has been placed in the context of other 'spaces and histories of craft-work' as a comparison (Bratich and Brush, 2011) such as the Arts and Crafts movement based on the premise that they share similar aims (Chansky, 2010; Williams, 2011). These authors suggest that highlighting links between the past and present is useful as we can assume people will share some similar motivations and reactions and the hindsight which we bring to study of history can provide us with new perspectives when we view today. There is also an argument that we cannot break ourselves into 'now' and 'then' as we all exist on a continuum of practices and beliefs informed by previous generations, and that knitting can therefore be seen as part of an evolving continuum of 'women's work' (Minahan and Wolfram Cox, 2007). Groeneveld (2010) and Johnson and Wilson (2005:116) support this discussion, arguing that to understand knitting today we need to be aware of what it meant historically, to 'examine production of textile handcrafts in contemporary women's lives through an historical lens' and that this increases the validity of findings by drawing on a 'wider foundation of reference materials'.

2.4 Making textiles and making identity: the current state of knowledge

This section draws on discussion throughout this chapter to outline key components of the current state of knowledge regarding women who hand knit as a leisure activity and the role that it might play in their identities. The section discusses three core propositions made in the chapter, firstly that there is a strong and complex relationship between textile production and women's identities. Secondly, knitting in particular seems to play an interesting role in

contemporary society as it stands for a number of contrasting stereotypes and values. Thirdly, knitting and making objects generally is important to our sense of self. These core themes are summarised here along with supporting literature. The section also proposes what these themes mean about what we do not yet know about women's knitting and therefore what my research sets out to explore.

There is a body of literature which agrees that textiles, both in use and in production, have played and still do, an important role in many cultures. Women have a close and specific relationship to textiles as those who have often been assigned the task of their production, whether out of necessity or as a leisure activity. The relationship between women's lives and the textiles they make and wear have been researched, from very early weaving (Wayland Barber, 1996) to the cultural meanings of cloth around the world (Weiner and Schneider, 1989). Parker (2010 [1984]) influentially considered another form of textiles, embroidery, as performing a role in the performance of femininities. Research has frequently focused on clothing and cloth as an easily manipulated and easily visible object through which to form and impose identities. Over the last fifteen years a strong body of work in the area of textiles and identity has develop, such as in edited volumes by Jefferies (2001), Harper (2012), and Hemmings (2012), *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* has been published since 2003, and a recent publication by Heti et al. (2014). There has been research regarding women's textile production, such as sewing, in historical contexts (such as Burman, 1999 and Goggin, 2009). If making textiles has been important in both the forming of women's individual identities and the communication of societal expectations of how they should behave and look then we might assume that contemporary knitting might similarly be a complex and valuable site to study to find out about women's experiences today.

There has been less research which has focused on the production of textiles in terms of women's identities than on the clothing they wear. There is, however a developing body of literature which suggests knitting is playing a

role in women's lives today. Knitting is presented in the literature as a way to create objects which are meaningful and gifts which forge a valuable connection between people (Turney, 2012). Additionally, the extent which knitting perpetuates arguably outdated and oppressive feminine ideals or can be a tool for more progressive empowerment is debated. Knitting can be a way to recognise the skill of women from the past or they can be dismissed as irrelevant and old-fashioned (Groeneveld, 2010). The role that knitting plays in contemporary women's lives is therefore complex. However, there seems a consensus that knitting remains surrounded in stereotype and interacts with a number of individual needs and societal narratives such as how women should behave, how we relate to one another, and the value we place on hand production of objects.

Much of the literature regarding contemporary knitting focuses on knitting as a form of activism (such as Chansky, 2010), knitting as part of a third wave feminist discourse (such as Myzelev, 2009), or knitting as an artistic practice (such as Nelson et al., 2009). This gives the impression that knitting is a 'movement', radicalised and given new meaning. Knitting has also been researched as a therapeutic activity (Corkhill, 2014) and in an industry context (Black, 2005). Research relating to new and exciting applications of knitting as a fashion statement, art technique and form of craftivism makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the ways a technique as old as knitting can adapt to various areas of modern life. These types of knitting have potentially attracted academic scrutiny and media attention because of the newness and contrast with more traditional ideas of knitting and knitters. However, by focusing on these contexts there is the potential that our current understanding is only partial. There are women not necessarily represented by these categories, as Turney (2009) has previously studied. They may not knit for political or artistic reasons, and they may have learnt recently or have been knitting since they were young children. The voices of women who are not necessarily blogging or celebrities could provide additional perspectives on how women relate to themselves and each other using their knitting.

Encouraged by Holliday (2007) who suggests researchers should consider their own personal interaction with existing literature I considered my own experiences of making textiles and reflecting on my identity. Although not wishing to suggest all women have the same experience of knitting as me, I felt the literature did not represent my relationship to knitting and other forms of textile production. Turney (2009) has studied the social and cultural significance of knitting, including as a leisure activity. My research builds on this publication, looking at a particular section of contemporary knitting.

A number of studies have recently begun to develop our knowledge of women outside of the categories above, often focusing on knitting groups (such as Prigoda and McKenzie, 2007; Humphreys, 2008; Fields, 2014; Stannard and Sanders, 2015). Stalp's (2015) call for diversity in research samples is balanced with other calls in the literature for research which focuses on a particular demographic of society. For example Stannard and Sanders (2015) rightly recognise the depth that can be achieved by an analysis that looks at a specific section of society, for example they studied a knitting group whose members aged between 18 and 30 years of age. This inevitably only considers some knitters and some of the role that knitting plays in contemporary women's lives. Variety and studying knitting as both an individual and group activity undertaken by women who are young, old, with children and without, can provide a broader picture and help understand their knitting as part of their whole lives rather than just confined to a couple of hours and particular social interactions. If identity is a process which happens throughout all aspects of our lives then only looking at knitting in terms of social interactions leaves out knitting in other contexts and therefore potentially other aspects of identity unexplored. Furthermore, knitting groups are often studied using participant and non-participant observation. These are credible methods but nonetheless leave untapped methodological potential to draw more heavily on the testimonies of those knitters as they reflect on all of their knitting rather than a part of it.

The review of relevant literature found a body of literature concerned with the role that objects, and making objects, play in how we form and communicate our sense of self. There is a common consensus that the objects we own and use form an important part of daily lives and interactions. This has been developed above in the specific examples of textiles and knitting in particular. However, scoping the literature also suggests a wider trend in the study of material culture that offers important implications for this research. There have been calls in the literature over the last twenty years for new ways of researching textiles that better integrate theorising with the experience of making and using textiles on which the theories are based. Tseelon (1995:3) argued that research investigating the role of clothing in our lives tended, at the point she was writing, to overlook the lived experience of wearing clothing, 'what is missing from the plethora of semiotic and sociological analyses of fashion styles and trends, historical accounts or psychological experiments is the reasoning given by the wearer's themselves'. Tseelon (1995) observed that textile research that had been published before 1995 frequently failed to integrate empirical evidence and theorising, resulting in research which either over-theorised or offered evidence without developing analytical implications. Although published twenty years ago, this argument has been echoed in the intervening period by Guy et al. (2001) who argue that the lived experience of wearing clothing has been under-theorised.

Although Tseelon (1995, 2001) was looking in particular at clothing research, this perspective can also be applied to knitting scholarship, as has been argued earlier in this chapter when a need for empirical studies was suggested (Section 2.3.5) . There remain calls from scholars who study objects more widely to find new ways to research them. Miller (2010) argues that semiotic analyses of objects, whilst a valid approach, have consequentially led to objects being portrayed in research as superficial and merely a passive vehicle to display a true inner sense of self. Miller (2010) argues that we should return our focus to the materiality of objects and view them as powerful communicators and creators of identity, and as an active part of us rather than

just vehicles for our inner selves. Miller (2010), like Tseelon (2001) believes over-theorising has led to a gap between theorising and the substance of objects and their role in our everyday lives.

The potential for familiar objects to be taken for granted, as Miller (2010) suggests, is not a new observation, for example both Aptheker (1989), writing over twenty years ago, and Turney (2009) more recently, call for academic attention to focus on the everyday complexities of women's lives. Stalp (2015) has recently commented that sociological research has tended to overlook leisure activities deemed feminine, including knitting. Although now more studied, it remains important to continue to shed light on the everyday objects and interactions that can be easily overlooked. For example, in the last year Pinker (2014) has observed that women's socialising can still be dismissed as frivolous and offering little insight of interest to the academic, despite being an important source of mental and physical wellbeing. Therefore, there is arguably still a contribution that research could make to existing knowledge by looking at what women themselves feel about knitting as an everyday experience.

Summary

This chapter has contextualised the conclusions presented later in the thesis by summarising and analysing the current state of knowledge relating to knitting and women's identities. It began by establishing a context for knitting and textiles in relation to theoretical concepts of identity. This suggested textiles are important objects in processes of identity making and communication, and that there is an historical connection between making textiles and femininity which may continue today. The chapter then outlined existing knowledge relating to contemporary knitting. This section established an overview including ideas such as whether knitting today represented new or old values, and how existing research looking at knitting today was

designed. This review of relevant literature suggests that knitting plays a complex and contested role for different women in British society and exists in a range of political, artistic and fashion based contexts.

The chapter ends with an examination of what is known and not known about contemporary women's knitting in Britain as a backdrop to view knitters in Edinburgh, the geographical focus of this study. The section discussed three key findings:

1. There is a well-established link between textiles and women's lives, historically and today. Textiles have been used to convey expected behaviour for women, as a source of sustenance, and as a creative outlet. This suggests that knitting could too play an important part in women's lives today, however research has tended to theorise identity through cloth and clothing production and use. There remains the potential to develop this understanding by looking at hand knitting as a leisure activity.
2. The literature suggests that knitting does seem to play a role in some women's lives today. The activity has received attention in the media and academic attention and it is at present an increasingly popular activity. There is a developing understanding of knitting as an activist activity, as an artist technique, as a form of therapy, and as fashion clothing. Knitting has appeared in popular culture, in drama series, non-fiction, and national papers. Although some of the more 'extreme' forms of knitting (i.e. knitting that is distant from its origins in the domestic sphere and production born out of necessity) have received academic attention, less focus has been given to knitting as a leisure activity. There is a growing body of literature that is now addressing this area, in particular focusing on the study of knitting groups. However, there remains potential for research which looks at knitting as a leisure activity which is done both on one's own and as part of a group.
3. The review of the literature has suggested that objects do play an important and well-researched role in our formation and communication

of self. However, the review has noted that textile scholarship has, perhaps by seeking to understand our relationship with objects by looking at what other source such as literature can tell us, sometimes produced accounts which feel separated from the lived experience of interacting with objects. Research in this area has done much to develop our understanding of how important textiles are in our lives, but this is not the only way to further our knowledge. Miller (2010) has made a similar observation, that there has been an over-theorisation of object relations and a lack of grounding in empirical evidence, in the wider context of material culture studies.

The review of the literature therefore suggests that our interactions with objects such as knitting do play a role in how we see ourselves and how others see us, and that this understanding could be furthered by alternative methods of investigation which seek to analytical conclusions on empirical evidence. The next chapter expands upon the way the research has been designed in order to address this gap in the literature.

Chapter 3 **Looping: A research methodology**

Introduction

This chapter sets out the qualitative methodology used in this research, the critical realist stance from which it was conducted, the three stages of data collection, and the process of analysis. The chapter explores the different options for structuring the research. The chapter will describe how the research is based on a repeated sequence of data collection and analysis, influenced by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Methodological information is included in the thesis with the intention of enhancing the trustworthiness and transparency of the research, as discussed in Section 3.10. The chapter is structured roughly chronologically, developing from the initial research stance through data collection and analysis. The chapter also discusses my position in relation to my research subjects by considering how being an insider and an outsider can affect the data collection and the conclusions reached. The chapter considers how the writing of the thesis is both part of analysing the data and presenting an outcome, before the quality of the research is assessed in terms of transparency and credibility. Given that the interviews in Stage 3 formed the main part of the study, most space is devoted to this stage and Stage 2, with additional information on Stage included in Appendix 2 the should the reader wish to consult this.

Richards (2005:7) says that research involves a cycle of planning, data collection, and data analysis and refers to this process as 'looping'. This terminology seemed appropriate to use here in the context of knitting as a technique based on a series of interlocking loops. Using the term 'looping' reminds us how the researcher affects the direction of the research throughout the process by controlling these loops, and how the resulting fabric is *theirs*, rather than an objective account (Gomm, 2004). Additionally, the metaphor of 'looping' describes a research design where findings and analysis are built on

the 'stitches' or groundwork which went before them. Furthermore, the loops between the conclusions and evidence are left visible to the reader as explicit links. By recognising and setting preconceived ideas to one side this design aims at negotiating a field proliferated by stereotypes, with a number of concepts derived from previous research and media comment, and one which I am already familiar with. The research design also addresses concerns raised in the literature review to find ways to investigate textiles and their production to generate theoretical propositions which are grounded in lived experience.

For the purpose of clarity it is necessary to define key terms and set out some notes on presentation and attribution of data. Anonymised quotes from the data are presented in italic (see Appendix 1 for ethical discussion). In the case of questionnaire responses these are identified using 'Q' and a number (i.e. Q1, Q2 etc.). In order that the reader can get a better sense of the interview participants as real individuals they have been assigned alternative names. Three key terms which describe the labels of different units of data are defined in Figure 4 below. This illustration highlights the process they describe which moves from many specific labels to a small number of abstract labels.

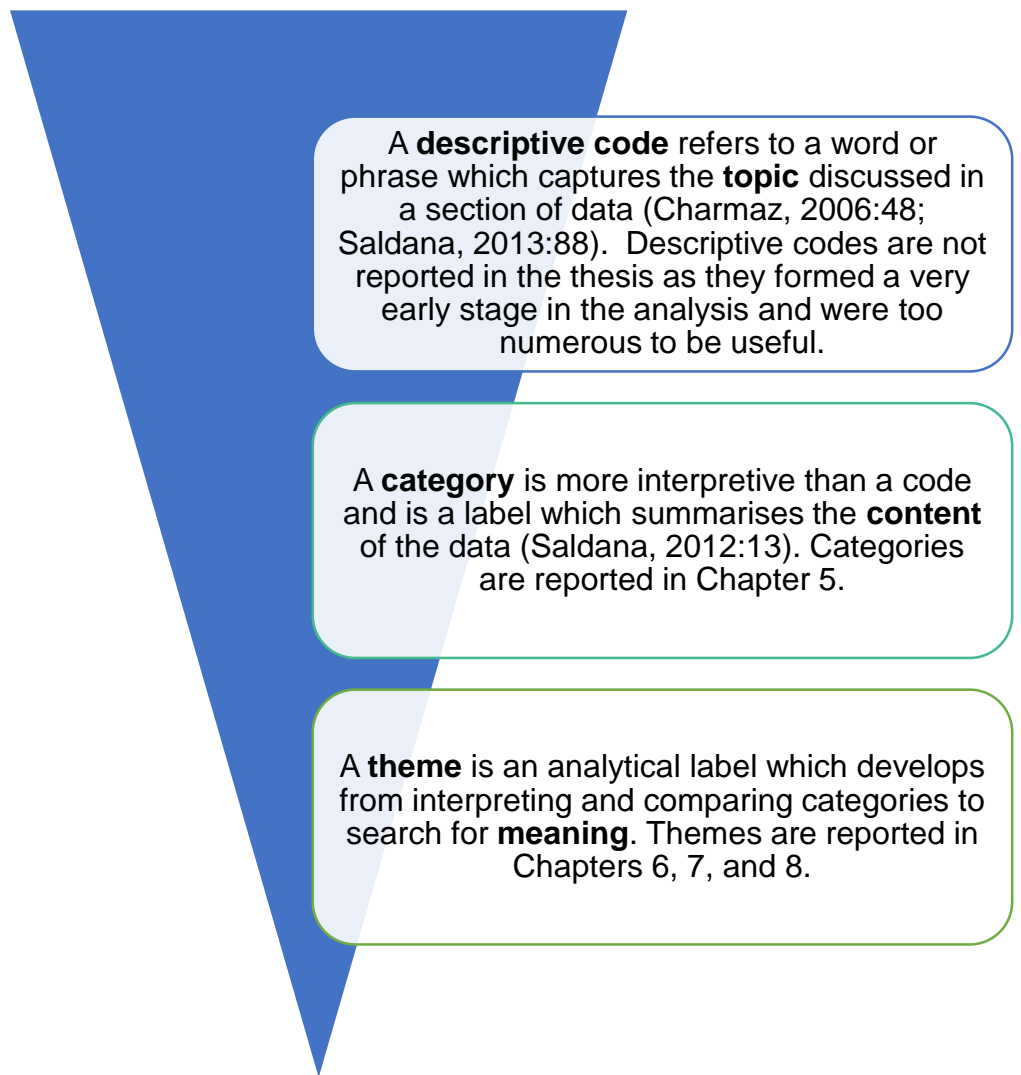


Figure 4: Definitions of coding types

3.2 The research approach

The critical realist perspective that informed this research will be defined before the implications for research design and execution are considered. Critical realism encompasses a variety of perspectives but for the purposes of this research it will be taken to mean an approach which sees no external reality. Instead, individuals are viewed as constructing their own realities (Patton, 2010). This is similar to a constructivist position, however constructivism is potentially problematic in that it renders study of social

phenomena theoretically impossible as the researcher can never view the world from the perspective of another. Critical realism instead opens social life to researchers to study as, although we cannot predict the outcome of events, the social world is viewed as having tendencies and patterns which can be observed and that we can attempt to understand and explain (López and Potter, 2001).

The researcher can therefore study phenomena but cannot ever gain a perspective free from values and culture and therefore should 'adopt a position of fallibility and scepticism' (Houston, 2001: 850). Moses and Knutsen (2007: 193) suggest viewing knowledge and values as both reliant on repetition on an individual scale but also as interacting with social structures and groups of people, suggesting that knowledge is 'carried by individuals but anchored in collectives'. They therefore believe that social research is possible as long as the resultant conclusions are owned as 'somebody's knowledge' rather than a universal truth (Moses and Knutsen, 2007: 193). Similarly, Miller and Glassner (2011:131) describe the researcher as accessing 'realities' rather than a single reality. A critical realist approach was useful for this research as it provides a way to recognise multiple perspectives and voices rather than a singular authorial voice, and the development of a personal 'accent' which recognises the impact of my own experiences and subjectivity on the interpretations (Carter, 2011). This was important as the research concerns many voices from research participants and additionally involves my voice as researcher and textile maker myself. A critical realist stance is useful in approaching a research where individual motivations and societal expectations seem to interact, for example knitting as an activity associated with a number of stereotypes, and that people do both alone and in groups.

Most critical realists believe our actions are influenced by social structures but are also shaped by our innate psychological traits and personal experiences. The extent to which individuals act according to societal expectations or live their lives based on their own desires has been a negotiation requiring balance throughout the research project. For example, a woman knitting a gift can be

viewed as both conforming to a gender-based ethic of care and an individual act of affection (see Section 7.5). López and Potter (2001) find some compromise by positioning us as reproducing and transforming, rather than creating, existing social structures. Likewise Miller and Glassner (2011: 132) suggest social expectations and rules may seem fixed but this depends on individual outlook and willingness to find alternative ways of behaving,

‘[d]ominant discourses are totalizing only for those who view them as such; they are replete with fissures and uncolonised spaces within which people engage in highly satisfying and even resistant practices of knowledge making.’

This provides a useful working model for the tensions between our own interests and the cultural norms and values which are imposed on us.

A critical realist influence has impacted upon the decision to conduct a qualitative phenomenological study in an attempt to access women’s own understanding of their experience and relate this to wider social structures (Patton, 2010). Applicable to much of our lives, this is a particularly apt approach to study textile production in women’s everyday life as Showalter (2012) observes the links between daily experience, textiles, and writing by likening the piecing of a quilt with the repetition and small everyday interactions that make up much of our lives. Buckley (1999) aims to write about textiles in a way that conceptualizes ‘female subjectivity’ and recognises the researcher’s specific experience and outlook as a tool rather than problem (see Section 3.7). The research is influenced by similar aims and a feminist perspective in two ways, firstly because it seeks out individual’s own perspectives on their experiences, and secondly because it aims to consider, where relevant, the impact of social structures on those individuals (Young, 1997).

The research seeks to understand how women themselves talk about their knitting. In order to understand some of these constructed realities the research was designed in such a way that it was the experiences and reflections of the women themselves that are collected before any

interpretation takes place, influenced by grounded theory methods which outlined below. Cándida-Smith (2003) discusses how in order to talk about life experiences we draw upon memories which could be viewed as collections of stories in that they are based on experience but are often distorted by time and perception. Therefore, taking a critical realist perspective, the stories people tell about their own experiences can provide a glimpse of collective experiences, 'a text is produced in accordance with semantic rules and narrative conventions; when we are living a narrative, a strip of life, we are realising certain rules and meanings' (Harré, 2001: 23). Maharaj (2001) refers to the potential for domestic textiles to be a 'conceptual device' with 'narrative force', implying they can tell us stories in addition to telling stories for us. Even if these stories, whether in objects, actions or words, are private and never publicly accessible, they can, Kuhn (2002) asserts, be understood as a desire to take part in collective rituals and gain a sense of social belonging.

This research proposes that, by asking women about their experience of knitting, a reality can be constructed that is a fair and trustworthy account that strives for a sense of truth. The term 'truth' is used here with caution. Frank (2004) has written eloquently about the difficult position of the social researcher who seeks to uncover a 'true' understanding of something, yet at the same time recognises that the conception of 'truth' as universal certainty is highly problematic within a constructionist world view. He solves this by referring to 'explanation' as the truth of social science. This is not explanation as a final solution or closure but as evolving and one of many. Frank (2004:439) encourages social researchers to not shy away from the endeavour to search for a truth whilst recognising complexity, 'we have to aspire to telling the truth, at least a truth'. If knowledge and meaning are 'contextual and negotiated' (Charmaz, 2006) then this does not mean conversation during an interview, for example, bears no relevance outside of that moment and those individuals. Rosenblatt (2003:227) locates his research in a postmodern context of contextual knowledge but also strives to recognise that his participants believe they are telling him their 'truth' and that he as researcher 'like the reporters, detectives, and others they believe to be seekers of truth'

can relay this truth. López and Potter (2001:9) acknowledge that our experience is constructed but also that there remains a true representation of this experience and an untrue one, '[t]ruth is relative to be sure but there is still both truth and error (and lies!)'.

3.3 Making data: research design and data collection

This section discusses the research design which looped between data collection and analysis in three stages (a mixed methods pilot, questionnaire and interviews). '[M]aking data', used in the title of this section, is a phrase borrowed from Richards (2005:37) to highlight the purposive and subjective nature of this stage, congruent with both a critical realist and grounded theory approach. To reflect how the decision to take a grounded theory approach to research design was influenced by the pilot study (Stage 1) the pilot will be briefly introduced before the rest of the research design. The section then describes the methods used for 'making data' in Stages 2 and 3. The chapter covers the main tasks and stages illustrated in Figures 5 and 6 below.

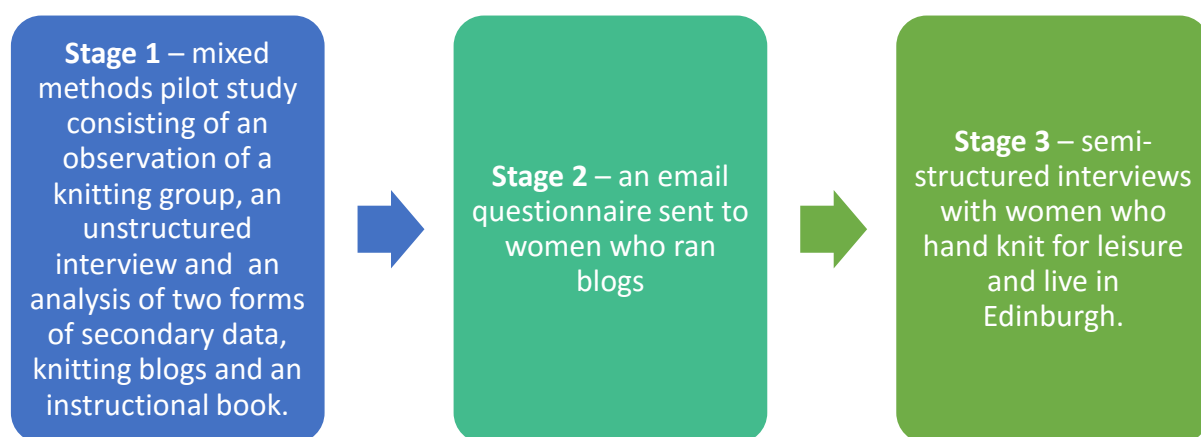


Figure 5: Diagram showing the three stages of data collection

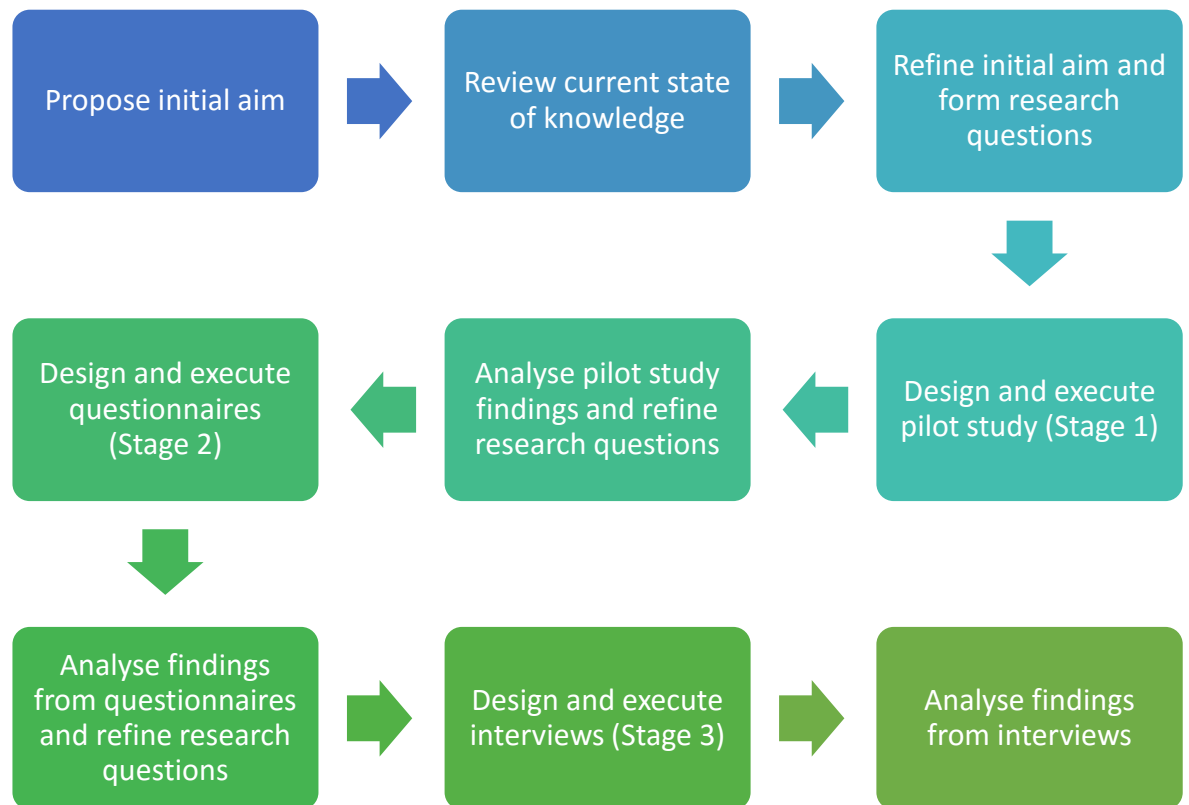


Figure 6: Key tasks and stages in the research

3.3.1 Pilot study: Research Stage 1

This part of the section briefly discusses the aims and methodological outcomes of the pilot study, the first stage of the research. The pilot study forms a small part of the overall research project and therefore is described here only in abbreviated form. More detail can be found in Appendix 2 and key findings from the pilot are presented in the next chapter. The pilot study was conducted early in the research in order to inform the research design by:

1. Testing data collection methods including:
 - a. Focus Group
 - b. Secondary sources
 - c. Unstructured interview

2. Testing analysis methods including:
 - a. Reflective analysis
 - b. Descriptive coding
 - c. Hypothesis driven coding
3. Generating initial broad findings
4. Raising potential methodological considerations
5. Helping overcome the 'overwhelming fear' that the researcher can be faced with when collecting and handling data for the first time, by starting data collection early in the research process (Saldana, 2013:66).

The Focus Group was conducted with a knitting group who meet weekly in a library in Edinburgh. The five knitters who attended ranged in age from between approximately 40 and 70 years old. The Focus Group was designed to explore the potential benefit of supplementing transcripts of audio recordings with my own reflective writing and involved an observation of a knitting group. Using reflective writing rather than a transcript was influenced by Devault's (1990) suggestion that the researcher will remember pertinent parts of interviews and how they were delivered in a more meaningful way than a transcript could convey. This was a useful technique as it forced me to consider my position and interactions with the group beyond what I might have considered had I relied on a transcript (see Section 3.7). The pilot study helped me consider the types of conversation that would provide the most informative discussion. Notable was the observation that I cannot assume every knitter could or would want to talk about why they knit. Some of the knitting group found it difficult to explain why they knitted as it was so embedded in their lives they could not imagine doing otherwise.

The next part of the pilot study involved textual analysis of secondary data consisting of a scope five blogs written by women and an analysis of an instructional knitting book, all published in the UK. The instructional book was Greer's (2008) *'Knitting for good!: a guide to creating personal, social, and political change, stitch by stitch'* and the blogs were *'Did you make that?'* (n.d.),

My happy sewing place (n.d.), *House of pinheiro* (n.d.), *Handmade Jane* (2013), and *Peas and needles* (2015). Information on the selection of these texts can be found in Appendix 2.2.1. Full reference details for the blogs can be found in the Reference List. This stage suggested that although using pre-existing data provides readily available information, this was not a suitable approach for this project given subjects could not be questioned to gain more depth and understanding. Additionally, the sample would necessarily be limited to those who published online which, whilst interesting, is not consistent with the aims of this research to gain access to a broader sample than is currently represented in much existing research.

The final part of the pilot study was an unstructured interview with a knitter living in Edinburgh who expressed an interest in participating in the research after hearing me talk about it at a University event. This stage explored the viability of creating a pre-defined coding scheme using concepts from the literature and my previous experience to analyse the data with. Whilst using pre-defined categories to code the interview was useful in quickly generating ideas I recognised that I was potentially seeing what I wanted to see in the data and forcing what was there to 'fit' rather than responding to what the interviewee actually told me. I was frustrated at not having uncovered a deeper understanding and felt the analysis I produced captured only surface level meanings. This experience was influential in the choice to take a grounded theory approach as a way to move more systematically through descriptive to analytical codes, progressing deeper into what is being said rather than making conceptual leaps.

3.3.2 'Looping' as a research design

Following the completion of the pilot study a grounded theory influenced design was adopted in order to answer concerns I had with using pre-conceived ideas to shape the analysis and to achieve the aim to produce

theoretical propositions which had strong links with empirical evidence. These aims stemmed both from the literature review described in the previous section and the outcomes of the pilot study. It is important to note that grounded theory shaped the research design from the end of the pilot study and was not inserted afterwards as a justification for a qualitative approach, as Charmaz (2006) criticises some authors for doing. Grounded theory was originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1967]) and was then updated by Charmaz (2006). Key features of grounded theory include the structure of 'looping' (Richards, 2005:6) between data collection and analysis. Also important is the process of step by step coding during analysis aimed at progressing from descriptive codes to analytical categories. This is designed to produce theoretical conclusions which are 'grounded' in the data. Charmaz (2006:1) describes this process as a 'journey' where 'we will climb up the analytic levels and raise the theoretical import of your ideas while we keep a taut rope tied to your data on solid ground'. These key features of grounded theory, summarised by Hall and Callery (2001:257) as 'theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, concurrent sampling and analysis, theory grounded on data, multiple levels of coding, and constant comparative analysis' are introduced below along with a consideration of the 'methodological fit' of this approach with the aims of the research (Richards, 2005).

Richards (2005) discusses the importance of 'methodological fit', referring to a fit between the design of the research and the research aims and questions. Grounded theory has 'methodological fit' with the aim of this research to ask women themselves about their knitting and to build theoretical understandings based on these responses. There are a number of stereotypes associated with knitting ranging from knitting grannies to stitch n' bitch. Taking this approach is a useful tactic to navigate the potential that, as a researcher, I will be affected by knowledge of these stereotypes. Grounded theory was also chosen in order to avoid over-theorisation without empirical support and in response to my experience in the pilot study regarding forcing the data to fit predefined categories and a desire for depth and interpretation (Miller and Fredericks, 1999:539). A grounded theory approach is appropriate as it acknowledges the

contingency and relativity of knowledge in line with a critical realist and feminist perspective. It also values subjectivity through recognising the impact of the researcher on the research and encouraging intuitive hunches to not only be made explicit but to be listened to (Charmaz, 2006). The approach is suitable as it is a theory aimed at demystifying the analysis process and avoiding technical jargon, therefore in line with my desire to create accessible and engaging research. Lees-Maffei and Sandino (2004) discourage obscure or complex terminology in academic writing, accusing researchers of hiding sparse theory behind complex language.

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1967]) in response to their experiences as qualitative researchers. They observed that there was a tendency for researchers to discuss theory as an afterthought rather than embedded in and stemming from their analysis of the data they had collected. Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1976]) argued that the value of the theoretical framework emerging from qualitative research was partly denoted by how it was arrived at. A rigorous and transparent methodology was therefore vital in their eyes in order to create sound theoretical conclusions. They formed the grounded theory approach to address their concerns with previous qualitative research designs such as the integration of theory and striving to minimise the effect existing literature can have on the distortion of analysis. They sought to create a clear and easily understood framework that could be understood by 'sociologists and layman alike' (2012 [1976]: 1). It is perhaps the straightforward nature of their approach to research design, with clear research steps, a lack of complex terminology, and a close attention to detail, that has contributed to the survival of the approach over nearly 50 years, albeit often now used in an adjusted form by contemporary researchers such as Charmaz (2006).

Friese (2001) is one of the few examples of an application of grounded theory within textile scholarship. She chose the approach to investigate what women's wedding dresses meant to them. This study provides a useful example to consider here as the motivations for adopting this approach are

similar to those in my research. After scoping existing literature Friese (2001:53) observed that wedding dresses were often conceptualised by researchers as just another piece of clothing or functioning to be 'admired by others' on the wedding day. Friese (2001) suspected that this might have left some of the role that a wedding dress plays for the bride, before, during and after the wedding, under researched. She suggests that this oversight stemmed from a prevailing attitude amongst the research community that production and consumption should be viewed as distinct stages in the life of an object. Friese (2001) suggested that there was no room within this perspective to consider what new meanings might be produced during the choosing, purchasing, wearing and keeping of a wedding dress beyond the initial production (in the material sense) by the seamstress. Friese (2001) felt there were common ways of viewing the wedding dress in existing research which meant part of its meaning was not fully understood and so used grounded theory to help her look closely at what was really happening and not just seeing experience through the lens of existing concepts. I too observed that prevailing tendencies to view knitting as a political statement or in a specific context or role (such as at a knitting group, as a gift, as a piece of activism) was leaving some of the meaning of knitting under researched (see Section 2.4). The implementation of grounded theory by Friese (2001) involved a series of data collection phases starting with observation and developing to interviews and focus groups as her understanding developed. The research reported in this thesis also followed a similar structure of broad data collection moving to more in depth and focused data collection.

This project could have employed a number of other approaches such as ethnography and indeed there are a number of overlaps with this approach, particularly in the use of in-depth interviews. Ethnography was considered as an approach from which to understand the perspective of women in relation to the role of knitting in their lives (Frank, 2004). It was recognised that observation or participant observation could have provided access to actual behaviour in addition to reported behaviour. However, the focus of this study

was primarily to explore the perceptions of women on knitting and identity and the chosen methodology addressed this effectively. I felt I brought some initial understanding of knitting as a knitter myself and as someone familiar with academic discourse surrounding knitting. Therefore I felt that becoming immersed in the culture of knitting through ethnographic techniques might have only confirmed my pre-existing assumptions. I therefore sought a way to acquire some distance through the rigorous process of data collection and step-by-step analysis that grounded theory offered. Grounded theory offered a framework which did not only suggest specific methods but that encompassed the whole of the research design and specifically addressed my concerns to derive theory from the data rather than impose existing frameworks, discussed in Section 2.5 (Charmaz, 2005).

Data collection presented alternatives in relation to the kind of interviews that were used, for example I considered an approach closer to oral history but this might have presented a less structured process, especially earlier in the research. Oral history interviews provide an invaluable resource, and have been used in a number of studies of women's craftwork, leisure and identity, such as with quilters (Cooper and Bradley Allen, 1999) and dressmakers (Tulloch, 2010). However, given that interviewing was introduced at the third stage of the research after preliminary studies had presented some initial analysis then more structured approaches to interviewing were chosen as suitable (see Section 3.3.4).

Traditionally grounded theory was based on the premise that the researcher could and should set aside all pre-existing knowledge, whether gained through previous experience or knowledge from existing literature (Glaser and Strauss, 2012 [1967]). This was designed with the aim of reducing the extent to which the researcher only saw what they were expecting to see in the data and thus inadvertently producing theory which corresponded with what they already 'knew' rather than what was actually happening. However, grounded theory has been criticised for being unrealistic in the assumption that someone can wipe clean any existing knowledge and experience they bring to the research,

'[t]here is a difference between an open mind and an empty head' (Dey, 1999:251). Charmaz (2006) presents an updated version of grounded theory to answer these concerns. She argues that whilst forgetting pre-existing knowledge is neither possible nor desirable, the researcher should acknowledge their assumptions and set them aside in order that they still adhere to the aims of grounded theory and respond to what is in the data they have collected. Additionally, this serves to enhance the transparency of the research as the reader is made aware of the subjectivity of the researcher in shaping the research (Patton, 2010). This thesis therefore includes a traditional review of existing literature in the second chapter to assess what is already known. Drawing on my previous experience as a knitter and my knowledge of existing literature was useful in forming an initial broad research focus and provide 'ideas to pursue and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic' Charmaz (2006:16). In this research therefore the existing knowledge base was used, as Charmaz (2006:17) supports, as '*points of departure*' and then reintroduced at a late stage of analysis to inform interpretation rather than shape it (*italics in the original*).

Grounded theory methods are designed to help researchers generate theory that has a close relationship with, or is 'grounded' in, the data (Charmaz, 2006). This is done by beginning with a close reading of the data. The researcher then progresses through levels of analysis from descriptive codes to a theoretical understanding. This sequence, and the avoidance of preconceived categories from the existing literature, is aimed at helping the researcher avoid leaps from looking at the data to theorising. Analytical leaps potentially produce either theory that does not reflect what the data is saying, or theory that is repeating existing knowledge without corroborating it through evidence. These are concerns in any research but particularly pertinent in the context of knitting related research, as discussed in Chapter 2. An avoidance of pre-conceived categories is useful when working in areas loaded with cultural and sociological meanings such as women's textile production, as Devault (1990:101) suggests,

'[w]hat researchers can do is to take responsibility for recognizing how the concepts we have learned as sociologists may distort women's accounts. We can return to activities conducted in specific settings as the sources for our studies, and ground our interviewing in accounts of everyday activity-in accounts of how particular women actually spend their time.'

Researchers must consider how labelling and conceptualising things gives them or takes away from them, value and significance, 'naming is political – the labels attached to activities establish and justify their social worth- and that women's activities have often been labelled in ways that serve the project of controlling and subordinating women' (Devault, 1999:80). Devault (1990) gives the terms 'housewife' and 'housework' as examples of labels which bear cultural meaning and a value-based assumption. In the case of this research it was important to be similarly wary when using other value-laden terms such as 'craft', 'domestic', and 'feminine'.

Textile related research has used both inductive (building theory on observation) and deductive (building a theory and then testing it) approaches. For example, Humphreys (2008) uses Negus and Pickering's (2004) definition of creativity to understand contemporary craft, and Springgay et al. (2010) use the concept of an aesthetic of civic engagement to interpret the actions of a knitting group. This can be useful in 'sensitizing' (Charmaz, 2006:16) a researcher to what may be going on in the phenomenon being studied. This research used some theoretical frame to aid interpretation, but this was introduced well into the analysis procedure to ensure that this theory was being chosen to suit the data and not the other way round. An example of a similar approach can be seen in the work of Turney (2004:267) who speaks of seeking to avoid viewing objects in terms of an existing dialogue regarding 'taste', instead aiming to examine craft in a more 'dynamic' way. Rather than apply predetermined definitions of terms such as 'craft', 'value' and 'art', she suggests fluid definitions which will allow her to respond to her interviewees openly rather than shaping their responses to fit her initial ideas. Similarly,

studying women's relationship to their wedding dresses, Friese (2001) explicitly outlines her adoption of a grounded theory approach and how her observations shaped her research focus as the project progressed.

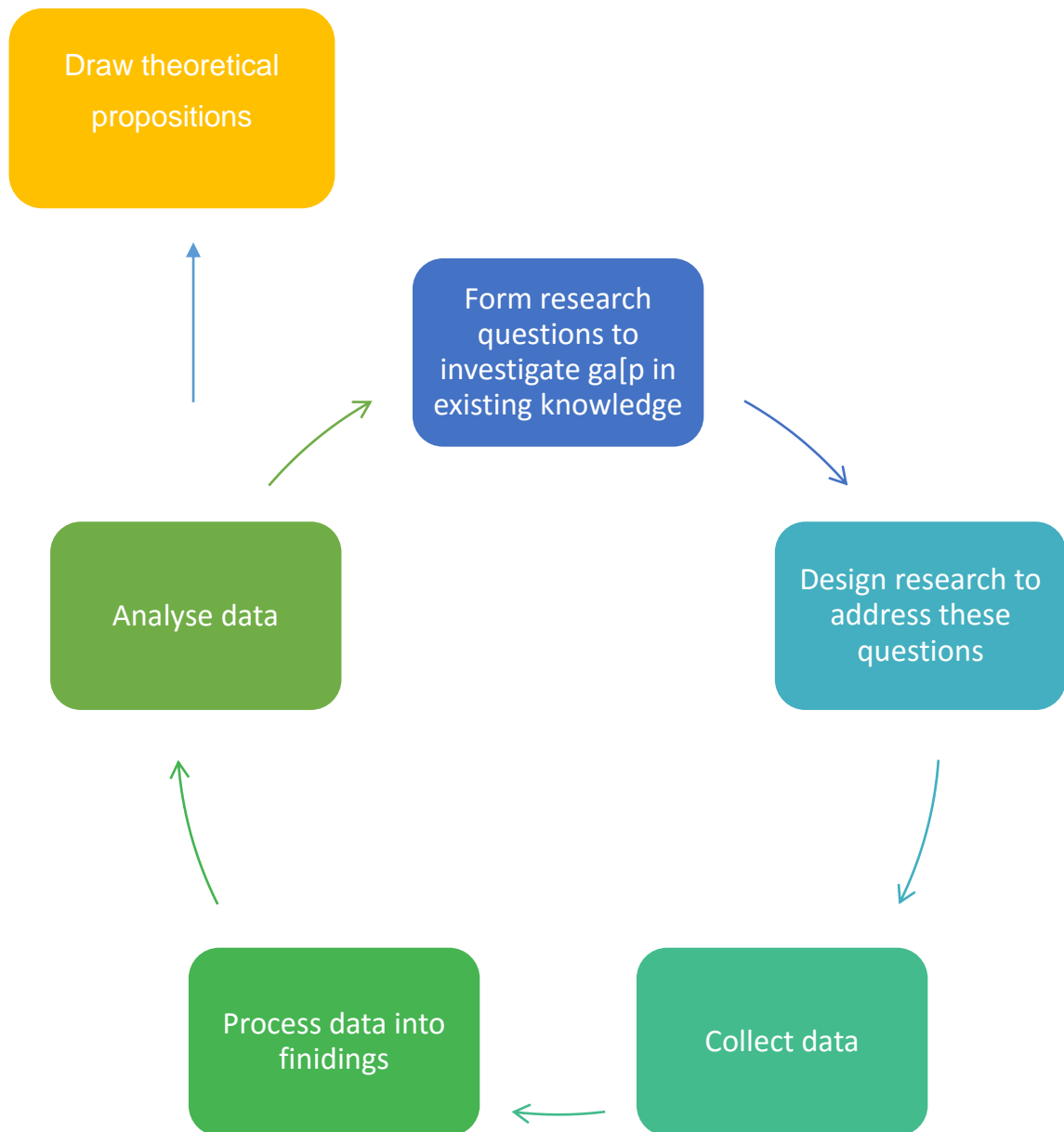


Figure 7: The research cycle

A distinguishing feature of grounded theory methods is the repetition of cycles of data collection and analysis. To reflect the actions involved in knitting, I have used Richards' (2005:7) term 'looping' to describe the process of not only

cycling back through data collection and analysis but also returning to previous 'stitches' to inform the next. As a complex knitted pattern is built in layers, each responding to the previous row, so is research a series of actions and decisions which inform the next, '[o]ut of such processes come bigger ideas, and, by hard work, from these loose threads can be woven something more like a fabric, of good explanations' (Richards, 2005:68). We could think of research as bricolage, assembling a theoretical fabric that unifies the loose threads of observations, findings and concepts and which involves 'emergent design, flexibility and plurality' (Rogers, 2012:1). Figure 7 illustrates the cyclical structure of the research, with blue indicating stages before data is collected and green indicating stages involving an interaction with the data. The pilot study and questionnaire stages of the research each involved a full loop of the diagram from the blue stages to the green stages. After the third stage, involving interviews, the research departed from the data collection and analysis cycle to draw theoretical propositions.

Data collection was designed to be effective in exploring the research focus, efficient in that it is achievable within the time scale and available resources, and to fulfil the desired depth, breadth and quality (Richards, 2006). The research sought to explore women's understandings of their knitting. The pilot study demonstrated the viability of asking women themselves about their knitting as a more rewarding process than using pre-existing data. Therefore Stage 2 involved questionnaires and Stage 3 consisted of interviews. Moses and Knutsen (2007) advocate multiple methods as a way of accessing different types of data to explore emergent themes and López and Potter (2001) suggest flexibility in method choice so that the methods can be selected in order to suit the focus of study, echoing Richards' (2005:37) notion of 'fit' between aims, sample and method, introduced above. Whilst asking questions which are shaped by my own experiences and hunches that have emerged from the previous stages of the research could be criticised as shaping the data, Charmaz (2006:34) defends this approach, arguing it is a requirement of the researcher not to passively collect information but to '*generate data*'.

The study of textiles, women's leisure time and material culture have developed as areas of research over the last thirty years. There remains the potential to develop and strengthen these areas through rigorous empirical research which seeks to move closer to understanding the everyday experiences of women today (Parker, 2010 [1984]; Miller, 2010; Stalp, 2015). This research makes an important contribution to scholarship in the study of textiles, of material culture research more generally, and of women's leisure time, by combining a focus on the experience of knitting as an everyday leisure activity, in women's own words, with practical theorising supported by empirical evidence and a robust research design. My research will do this by using methods, approaches and quality markers from social research. Within textiles as an emerging discipline the tendency may have been to over-theorise to establish its academic credibility or independence, and to focus on the more extreme types of knitting such as in yarn-bombing, rather than looking at a leisure context as a perhaps more familiar area. Chapter 2 argued social research methods have not been utilised fully by textile researchers and Stalp (2015:261) has also suggested that women's leisure characterised as 'feminine' such as knitting have not received enough attention by sociologists and those studying leisure activities, 'feminine leisure pursuits [remain] mostly on the sidelines in sociology and leisure research'. My research seeks to address both observations through its interdisciplinary approach.

3.3.3 Questionnaire design: Research Stage 2

Stage 2 was designed, in line with grounded theory, to quickly acquire data which could be analysed to inform theoretical sampling in the next stage of data collection. An email questionnaire sent to bloggers was an ideal choice as it is a convenient way to contact people and for them to reply (compared to, for example, postal questionnaires). The initial contact was selected by convenience, i.e. they were easily accessible and apparent in an internet

search. Further participants were identified using a snowballing method, using one blog to lead me to others, taking advantage of the networks of makers that I had observed in the pilot study. Blogs were chosen as a way to access textile makers after noting during the pilot study that there tended to be interaction between the public and textile bloggers and I therefore proposed that that contacting this open and interactive community might provide a reasonable reply rate. Additionally, bloggers were a suitable sample because they were used to writing about their making and therefore likely to feel comfortable completing the questionnaire. 45 women were contacted fulfilling several simple criteria:

1. A contact email was provided;
2. Their website had been updated in the last six months to make it more likely that they were still making things;
3. They were UK based (given the UK focus of this research, as outlined in Chapter 2);
4. Their blog had a reasonable focus on knitting.

It may be easier for respondents to misrepresent things via email than collecting data in person (Charmaz, 2006). This may be deliberate or due to misinterpretation, either on my part or theirs. In light of these considerations, questions were short, succinct and clear. Additionally, it seemed these costs could be counterbalanced later in the research, when interviews were used, which allowed more interaction with participants to explore the initial themes generated by the questionnaires. Were participants' responses or my interpretations inaccurate at this stage, I could test them in the next stage with different participants and interrogate any discrepancies if necessary. In order to increase reply rate I included my 'credentials' as a maker in my enquiry after observing that the Focus Group during the pilot study talked more openly once they knew I also knitted.

The questionnaire was designed to be formal enough to seem credible but also friendly and inviting to encourage replies. The aim was to formulate questions

which were open enough not to force answers to reflect any of my assumptions, yet direct enough to make them answerable and to glean relevant insights. I therefore included questions that could be answered quite briefly:

1. What types of textiles do you make?
2. When and where do you do this?

These were followed by a question designed to encourage self-reflection and more detailed responses:

3. Why do you make textiles?

The last question was designed to allow the respondent to tell me a story with the hope of eliciting some detailed responses. This was influenced by the stories about knitted objects that I noticed were often used in Stage 1:

4. Is there something that you particularly remember making, and if so why?

The key findings from the questionnaire appear in Section 4.3 of the next chapter. Briefly, analysis of this stage generated the idea of knitters having both individual and collective identities and knitting as both relaxing and challenging.

3.3.4 Interview design: Research Stage 3

Stage 3 was designed to further explore the emergent themes from Stages 1 and 2 of the research. These themes are described in Chapter 5. Interviews were chosen as an ideal option for this stage as they provided the opportunity to speak to women in more detail. This section discusses the interview design and execution in terms of a series of balances between different decisions.

There are advantages to the observational methods used in several studies of knitting group participation (such as Prigoda and McKenzie, 2007 and Fields, 2014). These researchers have been able to discover what people really do rather than what they report they do. However, my research contributes to current understanding by asking women themselves how they feel about knitting rather than observing and interpreting their behaviour. Additionally, in-depth interviewing, rather than observing an individual within the context of their knitting group, arguably provides an opportunity to view the knitter's experiences more holistically. This responds to Henderson and Gibson's (2013) suggestion that leisure activities must be viewed against a wider context of individual and social factors.

In line with the critical realist research approach taken in this study, the interviews were viewed as conversations involving a co-construction of reality between me and the interviewee. This perspective was influenced by Holstein and Gubrium's (2003) notion of an 'active interview' where both parties are considered to be participating in a process of meaning making particular to that interview setting. However, this is not to say that the co-constructed meanings arising during the interview have no relationship to the lived experience of the interviewee outside of the interview. Instead, the interview is a construction between me and the participant but it is a construction which can be considered to relate to our 'real' experiences of the world outside of the interview (Charmaz, 2006). The extent to which the data collected is valid is dependent on issues such as the rigour with which the research is designed and executed, discussed in Section 3.10.

Charmaz (2006:25) advocates '[i]ntensive interviewing' to draw out participants' own understandings of their experiences. This is congruent with a feminist approach interested in understanding motivations and the participant's own understanding of their lives (Fontana, 2003). Narayan and George (2003) articulate this as interviewing both *for* stories and *about* stories by engaging the interviewee in the interpretive process of either their own experiences or, if this is difficult, of a general story. I did this by presenting my

understanding of what the interviewee had just told me back to them for reflection and also by asking them to comment on what other people had told me. Consistent with Charmaz's guidelines the interview schedule was designed to be balanced between open questions which might stimulate unanticipated answers and also questions which were strategically focused in order to explore specific themes that had emerged in Stages 1 and 2 of the research. Another balance was required between developing rapport and confidence with the participant, by fostering an informal and relaxed atmosphere, and yet also conduct the interaction as an interview not a conversation; for example to probe deeper than might be normal in general conversation and ask questions which help the participant articulate their intentions and meanings.

Intensive interviewing aims to get beneath the surface of experiences by:

- stopping the interview schedule to explore an interesting or surprising topic in more detail,
- clarifying statements,
- restating the participant's words to check you have understood,
- slowing down or speeding up the pace,
- using social skills to further conversation,
- respecting the interviewee and showing appreciation for their participation by treating their experience with interest and value (Charmaz, 2006).

Intensive interviewing positions the interviewee in the position of agency, treats them as experts and gives them affirmation and understanding (Charmaz, 2006). The importance of the relationship between researcher and interviewee is suggested by Rose (1997:191) who says 'if a sensitive collaboration has not occurred in the interview and the analysis, we may have 'heard' nothing'. The interview schedule was designed to be a guide for questioning, with flexibility to change according to the specific participant. This is congruent with grounded theory as it is both open and directed, 'shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible' (Charmaz, 2006:28).

Further developing the notion of an interview as a balance between different requirements, Charmaz refers to grounded theory as requiring great flexibility through tight control. The interviews were exciting processes of discovery where the interviewee was able to raise issues that had not occurred to me previously. I could afford to do this because the interview was also controlled regarding the sample and schedule.

Parts of the interview schedule were designed to elicit stories, for example I asked participants to tell me about a favourite item they had knitted. Carter (2011) advocates the use of stories to convey meaning and different voices in academic writing. Stories, she says, can act as a framework for deep meanings and the stories we grew up with can affect our 'accent' or personal voice. Kuhn (2002) agrees with the impact and potential of stories saying they can be a way of knowing ourselves by reflecting on what is instinctively important to us. Weber and Mitchell (2004) used stories to collect data about deep personal feelings by asking women to write about an item of clothing important to them, using prose, notes or poems. They were struck by how often these stories were about much more than merely consumption or fashion and touched upon complex and personal relationships and events. They describe these 'dress stories' as 'performative' implying a lively and reciprocal relationship between teller and listener. Stories and textiles could be described as playing an active role in representing, affecting and investigating personal experiences in a way that encourages and recognises multiple voices and the researcher's own 'accent'.

In order to draw out these stories it was necessary to ask questions using language which the interviewee was comfortable with and likewise consider carefully the setting of the interview. Devault (1990:99) reflects on her experience of research saying,

[o]ur talk happened in a way that I and my respondents knew and were comfortable with, because such conversations among women are often settings for discussing this kind of work ... several stopped in mid-sentence to ask, 'Is this really what you want?' 'Are you sure this is

helping you?’ They were prepared to translate into the vocabulary they expected from a researcher, and surprised that we were proceeding in a more familiar manner.

As Banin and Guy (2001) had such success with interviewing women in their own homes alongside their wardrobes I considered using a similar strategy. However, I was hesitant about entering stranger’s homes due to personal safety concerns and I was aware that some potential volunteers might not want to use their own homes for similar reasons. Therefore I chose cafés as a safe and neutral yet comfortable location for the interviews and one that might be conducive to conversation as most people are used to meeting for coffee as a social convention, influenced by Devault’s (1990) experience in the quote above.

Grounded theory suggests researchers should continue collecting data until ‘saturation’ occurs, where no new findings are being collected, ‘when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories’ (Charmaz, 2006:113). This is not to say that data collection should continue until events are merely repeated, it is instead focused on the researcher’s interpretation of those events and the point at which the conceptualisation of the observed patterns in the data is no longer new. In an ideal research study perhaps this is achievable, however most researchers additionally need to consider the practicalities of time and funding, and the reality that they are unlikely to be able to analyse in detail all data collection as it progresses. I would argue that in qualitative research such as this it is unlikely, if not impossible, that there exists a point where categories and themes are ‘saturated’ given the multitude of behaviours and ways of interpreting this behaviour. Instead it was useful to consider Dey’s (1999:257) concept of ‘theoretical sufficiency’ to describe the point at which the researcher begins to see clearly those patterns after partial coding and intuitive reflection and feels they are strong enough to pause or finish data collection in order to move to a more thorough analysis procedure. Congruent with Chamaz’s (2006:115) advice to use grounded theory as guidelines which work for the

researcher rather than prescriptive rules which become 'a machine that does not work for you', I trusted my instinctual suspicions that I had gathered enough data to explore themes in detail and stopped interviewing to progress with analysis after 30 interviews. I had anticipated a subsequent return to data collection after this, but I found that the combined data from the three stages of data collection was rich and dense enough to explore the identified themes thoroughly.

3.4 Women knitters in Edinburgh: Sampling and sample used in Stage 3

This section discusses the scope of the sample and the sampling method used, particularly focusing on the main research stage, stage 3. Both were chosen in order to fit with the research questions and a grounded theory approach. This section focuses on the interviews in the third, main research stage which involved women knitters living in Edinburgh, who were not doing so out of explicitly activist or artistic motivations or as a source of income. They were identified using volunteer and snowball sampling methods. The section then describes some key contextual information regarding Edinburgh as the location for this study and profiles some participants in order to give the reader some impression of the women and their location.

3.4.1 Sampling

Richards (2005) suggests that the process of defining a scope and sample involves identifying what data is sufficiently rich in order to generate new knowledge and answer the research questions. In line with grounded theory, theoretical sampling offered a route to choosing a sample which was most likely to provide the data I needed to answer my research questions. Given my

aim to understand motivations for knitting in terms of women's identities, and explore in detail the richest data I could collect, I sought a sample that was most likely to provide this. A similar approach has been used by Banin and Guy (2001) who used a purposive sample of 15 women who had volunteered on the basis that they were interested in clothing in order to access particularly rich data regarding women's relationships with their clothes. This is not the only way a sample could have been defined, for example other criteria such as age or socioeconomic group could have been used, indeed some literature has suggested that economic prosperity does effect participation in knitting (Springgay, 2010). The pilot study did seem to suggest there may be attitudinal differences between the younger bloggers and older knitting group members including choice of yarn fibre and complexity of pattern. However, this was not the aims of the research but could provide an interesting avenue for future study.

A theoretical sample of women was chosen that was aimed at selecting those for whom knitting was important and who identified with knitting playing some form of role in their lives. This is congruent with Charmaz's (2006:96) definition of the strategy as 'seeking pertinent data to develop your emerging theory'. Additionally, the sample was limited to those who knitted as a leisure activity rather than explicitly as an activist, artistic or professional pursuit. Those interviewed who were involved in knitting as a profession also knitted as a personal hobby. Volunteer and snowball sampling were chosen as ideal ways to recruit participants that fitted my brief. Snowball sampling involved establishing contacts and using them to lead to more. Volunteers were contacted through leaflets in knitting shops (see Appendix 3.1). This was appropriate for this research as knitters do not, other than at knitting groups, have formal meeting places or registers, and so knitting groups and shops provided informal hubs to make contacts. The literature (for example Humphreys, 2008) and the findings of the pilot study indicate that knitters tend to know other knitters or it tends to come up in passing conversations with people, for example *'you can strike up really great conversations through knitting ... and it is very binding kind of thing'* (pilot study interview). This

research therefore took advantage of these networks to make contact with an enthusiastic sample.

'Knitters' were self-identified rather than based on their experience or competence. It was assumed that those who identified with the research would volunteer to be interviewed and therefore the sampling method was chosen as a way to get rich data from enthusiastic and willing participants. This was judged to be of greater value than the disadvantages of this sampling method. It is not claimed that this is a representative sample aimed at producing generalisable conclusions, rather a sample aimed at developing a detailed understanding of the phenomenon by selected women who identify as 'knitters' and for whom it plays a role in their everyday lives (Charmaz, 2006).

During the interviews participants were asked about their reasons for volunteering in order to get some broad impressions about how these reasons might affect the data collected. Six of the sample referred to a previous link to research projects in a University context which had meant they were keen to help, for example Yvonne had used research participants in her PhD said '*I feel there is karma to pay back*' and Penny similarly said, '*I was a member of the university I was an honorary senior lecturer so I feel should give something back*'. Nancy had used findings generated by social research in her job so wanted to support those undertaking such research. All may have felt more comfortable volunteering because their previous contact with research meant they could imagine some of what to expect in terms of questioning. Bourdieu (1984) points out that in activities which require a degree of cultural capital, skills and local knowledge those who are able to partake in these activities are likely to be able to also use their cultural capital to verbalise their experiences. Appropriately, Bourdieu uses examples of knitted items to illustrate the notion of activities which have a high amount of cultural capital invested in them. He writes of 'sweaters in real Shetland wool, genuine pullovers in pure natural wool...Norwegian woollen caps' (Bourdieu, 1984:220. Whilst there will be more discussion of capital and knitting in the analysis (see Chapter 8), it is worth considering here how the sampling method – targeting those who feel

comfortable and able to verbalize their experience – would potentially target those with cultural capital at their disposal.

Other interviewees volunteered because they thought more research should be done in the area of knitting and textile scholarship, although these comments may have sprung from politeness rather than conviction. It may also indicate that although knitting may be unremarkable to them (in that they do it every day) they see an importance that makes it ‘research-worthy’, for example

‘I think it’s great that someone is actually looking at knitting because again I think for so long its sort of been hidden away its been unfashionable and I think somebody needs to do some research into it as to what why we’re doing it into what fulfilment we get from it’ (Vicky).

Others said they were interested in what they would say in response to my questions, or in what other knitters said to me. Given this eagerness to ‘*give something back*’ (Penny) and to have something they cared about portrayed in a positive way, the interviewees may tend to try and give me the data they thought that would help the research. In as much as it is possible to judge, the interviewees did seem to present knitting in a balanced way, discussing both positive and negative aspects of the activity. I noted after some interviews that the interviewee had been particularly self-reflective during our discussion. Steps were taken to help the participant not feel pressurised to present knitting in a certain way. For example, they were assured of their anonymity in any publications and of the data security procedures that were to be used.

3.4.2 Edinburgh as a research focus

All participants lived or worked in Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland. As discussed in Chapter 2, knitting has played a significant part in the fortunes of Scotland and Britain, and elements of this history still capture our imagination. For example, Aran jumpers and Fair Isle patterns remain in common parlance

amongst knitters and non-knitters and both herald from Scottish islands. This section briefly considers the social and economic context of knitters living in Edinburgh to continue the story of knitting in Scotland into 2015. All Figures and statistics, are drawn from '*Edinburgh by Numbers 2014*' (City of Edinburgh Council Corporate Governance, 2014) unless otherwise stated.

Knitting is traditionally associated with older women, such as the image of granny knitting beside the fire, although it is now increasingly also associated with young, upwardly mobile professionals of the 'stitch n' bitch' generation. In 2012 the largest age range of inhabitants in Edinburgh was 25-34 year olds (18% of the population) followed by those younger than 16 years old. Some of the interviewees were not originally from Scotland, reflecting the diverse population of Edinburgh with residents originally from countries such as (in order) Spain with 1914 workers, Poland, Italy, India, Ireland, China, France, Greece, Australia and lastly USA with 332 workers. Large areas of Scotland are sparsely populated but Edinburgh, as a city of tenement- and flat-dwellers, has a much higher number of inhabitants per km². In 2012 Scotland had an average of 68 inhabitants per km², whereas Edinburgh had an average of 1828 people per km².

Knitting is associated with relaxation and wellbeing (Corkhill, 2014). In terms of the wellbeing of residents in Edinburgh, in 2012 the city had higher ratings for life satisfaction than Glasgow, the largest Scottish city, and major English cities such as Leeds, London and Birmingham. The quality of life for residents is also indicated by a life expectancy comparable with other large UK cities and a higher life expectancy than its neighbour, Glasgow, although slightly lower than London. Knitting groups often take place in the evenings, requiring participants to make their way home in the dark, at least during winter hours. In 2013 the vast majority (91.1%) of Edinburgh inhabitants asked said they felt safe being out in their neighbourhood after dark.

Knitting requires some spare income and time, as will be discussed during analysis. In 2013 71.1% of residents in Edinburgh of working age were in

employment, similar to the national average. Edinburgh has several universities and 40.7% of all residents are students, compared to 23.3% of the national population. It has a lower retired population than the national percentage. Many of the interviewees were employed in Higher Education or worked for the Scottish Government. The University of Edinburgh was the third largest employer in Edinburgh in 2014, other universities in Edinburgh fell within the top twenty largest employers, and the Scottish Government fell in seventh place. Using an average of comparable UK cities, Edinburgh had a lower percentage of people in receipt of Job Seeker Allowance, about 3% compared to an average of between 5% and 6% average. Although the number of people receiving Job Seeker Allowance is higher in Scotland as a whole than Edinburgh, it is still lower than the UK average. Edinburgh had a higher average gross earnings per resident in 2013 than most other major UK cities other than London. It is also an educated working population, with 42% of working age residents in 2013 holding a degree level or above qualification, again only coming second in major UK cities to London.

The sample was not selected on the basis of socioeconomic status, however it is possible, and may be useful, to consider the ways that the sample are a homogenous group. Some of the characteristics the group broadly share are discussed below. There is a body of research which has investigated the impact that socioeconomic status can have on life chances and experiences such as upon access to physical activity in leisure time (Wardle and Steptoe, 2003), aspects of wellbeing such as levels of creativity (Dai et al., 2012), and social inclusion and mobility (Livingston and Helsper, 2007). It seems there is less research which looks specifically at socioeconomic status and access to serious leisure activities that are sedentary or social such as knitting. This was not the focus of this study, but Springgay et. al (2011) have proposed that knitting, at least in its present form with luxury yarns and knitting groups in coffee shops and pubs, relies on a disposable income. This thesis includes some initial thoughts on this link which future research might explore.

As introduced above, my sample was largely drawn from the clientele of local independent knitting shops and knitting groups. These initial contacts also led to other volunteers as they passed on word of the project. Some of the possibilities that were considered early in the research were to access a sample through other locations such as larger yarn suppliers, for example 'John Lewis' or 'Hobbycraft'. 'John Lewis' is a well-established national department store in the UK. The stores were some of the first to introduce extensive yarn departments along with shop assistants who were knowledgeable about the activity and who could run classes (Sheard, 2014). Therefore, the knitters who shop in 'John Lewis' have the potential to have been loyal shoppers there for a number of years, be willing to spend a reasonable amount on yarn, or may be beginners looking for advice or occasional shoppers seeking a bargain at sale time (as Sarah, one of the interviewees in this study described herself). 'Hobbycraft' is also a national chain, but in contrast to 'John Lewis' and independent stores it tends towards the budget end of the market which may attract those with less disposable incomes or those who are newer to knitting and want to invest less as beginners. There is also arguably less of an association with knowledgeable employees and more of a tendency to stock cheaper yarns outside of the more well-known brands. Choosing to exclude these sampling locations, with their potential associations with knitters and shoppers with different characteristics and needs, may have excluded certain populations. Furthermore, accessing a sample could also have been done through media or the internet which would also have included and excluded some groups. For example, the readership of 'BUST', a feminist magazine which includes craft articles, might draw a different set of knitters to magazines such as 'Molly Makes' which is a magazine which arguably has less of a political motivation and a broader readership.

This study is likely to be specific to Edinburgh with a different sample resulting from, for example Shetland or even Glasgow, let alone Lahore or Toyko. Many of the women interviewed bought luxury yarns from independent knitting shops, spent time in cafes and pubs knitting with other women, and had the

cultural and social capital arguably needed to volunteer to be interviewed for a research project such as this. Viewed within the wider context of Edinburgh, introduced above, the knitters live within a comparatively affluent and educated city with a considerable mobile population. Shetland is an island off the North-East coast of Scotland and has a long tradition of knitting both for sustenance and as a vital source of income (Abrams, 2006). In comparison to Edinburgh we could speculate there may be significant differences in the role that knitting plays in the lives of people who live there. This suggests comparative studies may be useful in the future.

The alternative samples discussed here were not chosen as this is a small-scale, qualitative piece of research with a focus on understanding the construction of identity rather than the different focus concerning the impact of socioeconomic factors. The analysis presented in Part 2 of the thesis will discuss some of the potential connections between the determination to use leisure time in a productive and intellectually challenging activity, as expressed by many of the sample, and the particular socioeconomic similarities they have as a group. Further research is required to explore these ideas more explicitly. I recognise that the quite distinctive features of this sample could be explored further. That this study raises these speculations as hunches requiring further exploration is consistent with the grounded theory approach to research used here. Individual research projects are seen as small parts of the bigger process of increasing our understanding that offer as many, if not more, questions as they do answers (Charmaz, 2006).

3.4.3 The knitters

This section discusses the interviewees that formed the final main stage of the data collection. It has two aims, firstly to provide the reader with an impression of the people behind the quotes and analysis presented in the

second half of the thesis, and secondly to discuss some of the uniting qualities of the group and the extent to which it is possible to characterise the type of people or knitters they are.

The participants were aged between early twenties and over 65, as shown in Figure 8. Participants were asked to select an age bracket and the most frequently ticked bracket was 25-34 years old. The knitters I interviewed were largely either civil servants or university staff. This was likely to be due to the snowball sampling method which tended to lead to recruited people known to each other. They also tended to be members of one of three local knitting groups, or frequent the shops associated with these groups, due to both word of mouth recruiting and leaving leaflets in these shops. Detailed information regarding socioeconomic class was not collected, but using their professions the sample seems predominantly made of middle-income women who had some spare income to spend on knitting supplies. They also had some spare time to attend knitting groups despite generally having full time jobs. The exceptions to this were a new mother who was currently on maternity leave and a several women who were retired. The women were mostly British and some had moved to Edinburgh from other places in the UK or abroad, such as Chile and America. Most seemed to consider Edinburgh as their home so could be considered more permanent than temporary residents.

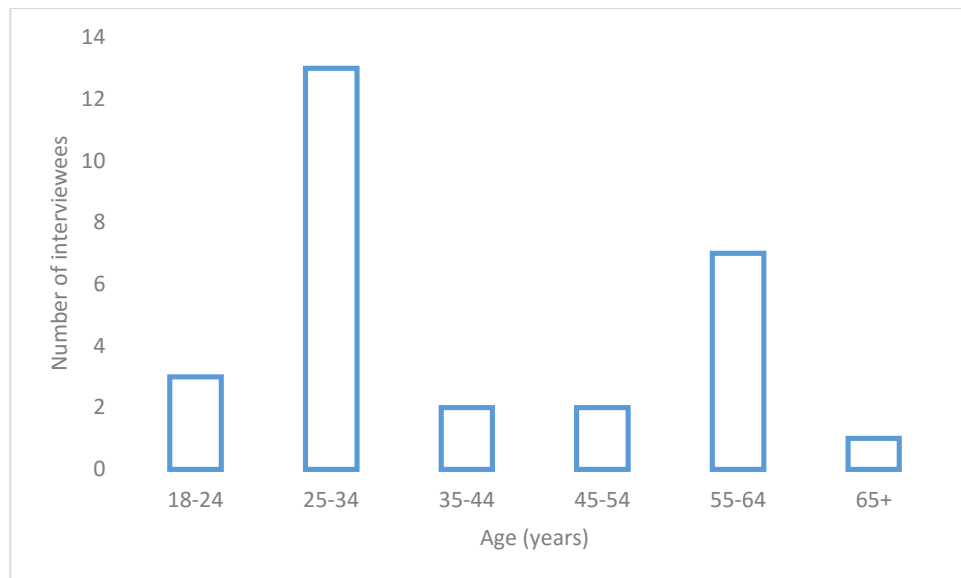


Figure 8: Age distribution of Interviewees

Most interviews took place in cafés within Edinburgh. One interview took place in the knitter's home because I had met her in person before arranging the interview and another home interview was arranged to accommodate the participant's disability. For each other participant I asked them to choose a café in a convenient location for them. One opted instead to choose her workplace. Although cafés were generally noisy they offered a safe and informal location where interviewees could be at ease. One of the most enjoyable interviews was with someone who brought their young baby with them and the recording is punctuated with periods of banging where the baby occupied herself with using the table as a drum. This interviewee discussed in detail her experience of becoming a mother and the impact on her identity. We might have had the same discussion without her baby present, but I would hope my accommodating her, and us both taking pleasure in her musical exploits, created a relaxed atmosphere which contributed to her confidence in talking to me. I offered to buy a drink for each participant, but most preferred instead to buy their own. Below are some short descriptions of particularly memorable interviewees as contextual information to accompany the findings and analysis.

Chloe is a 20-something who designs patterns as part of her income.

Elaine owns a knitting shop. She is 'larger than life', American, and passionately enthusiastic about all things related to knitting. She is an important member of her local knitting community.

Gemma is a scientist and at first I felt intimidated by her status as a 'proper researcher'. However, once it was clear I was a knitter she seemed to warm to the research and discussion. She was serious about her knitting and other creative activities and spoke with a wry humour.

Ivy wore a hand knit jumper to the interview which was a complex lace pattern. She later told me she designed her knits herself, using a formula to take the lace pattern, her gauge and her measurements, and work out how many repeats to do. She is a university lecturer and spoke in a precise and careful manner.

Kay was, in her own words, 'addicted' to knitting. She talked 'ten to a dozen' about it and was very generous with her time, spending over an hour enthusing to me about the activity. Given that she had not been knitting very long it was a chance to speak to a new knitter who had only recently joined a knitting group. I did not ask many questions during this interview as Kay was happy to talk freely about knitting.

Laura knitted throughout our conversation. The interview began slightly awkwardly as we were both sitting at separate tables for a while, unable to see each other's knitting which was to be our sign as we had not met before. She knitted smoothly and quickly, not looking down and maintaining the flow of the conversation throughout. She was knitting in purple yarn which she had bought on holiday with a friend and was now knitting into a cardigan as a gift for the same friend.

Olive's walk home started the same way as mine so for a while we continued talking about knitting whilst we walked together. She is a similar age to myself and works at a university. She left saying she felt reinvigorated and was keen

to knit as soon as she got home. She recently emailed me a link to a newly released book that she thought would interest me.

Penny used to be a doctor and spoke about the freedom and autonomy she now had in her weaving and knitting. She approached both with a desire to challenge herself to the extreme and perform to her best.

Zoe was wearing a chunky lime green hand knit cardigan with cables snaking up it. She was reflective about her knitting practice and spoke with generosity about sharing her knitting with others, through teaching and gift-giving.

Bridie led the interview, telling me what she wanted to talk about and needing no prompts from me. She was wearing a stunning handmade dress in Harris tweed, the Harris label proudly sewn onto the back of the neck. Bridie checked her emails during our conversation, confirming the time of her next appointment. Clearly a busy woman she nevertheless donated her time to talk about knitting. She was determined about supporting local producers, speaking of buying poor quality yarn because she had seen the field where the alpacas lived. When travelling down for meetings in London she deliberately wore tweed or local wools, acting as a type of ambassador for Scotland.

Gail brought her young baby with her who entertained us throughout the interview, banging on the table and reaching for my Dictaphone. Gail was relaxed and clear about how knitting was a way to make a new identity after having a baby. She shared childcare with her partner and spoke of how her days at home with her daughter were busier than her days in work.

3.5 Between insider and outsider

This section discusses how, as a knitter and a co-constructer of meaning within the interview, I am an insider in the research. Additionally, my position as an academic researcher and the complexity of individual identities means I am also an outsider to each participant. The section first describes my relationships to the research and participants before considering the implications of these relationships. This consideration of positioning was triggered by this part of my research journal, written early in the pilot study after observing a knitting group:

Throughout the session I did not feel how I expected to. I did not feel in control or like I imagined a 'Researcher' would. Whilst I would have liked to have felt more confident, or perhaps if I am honest more powerful; on reflection I realise that I have to make a choice about what role I want to play in relation to the group. I didn't take on an authoritative role and the group seemed comfortable and easy in my presence. My attendance at the session led to me being incorporated so much into the group that I felt I had become implicitly accepted as a member and left to assurances that 'you will come again won't you', 'we can be your guinea pigs for your research', and 'you must come back but only if you bring your knitting' etc. Taking on a non-confrontational, not in-control approach had resulted in, I feel, more natural conversation and a more welcoming and open response from the group. This experience has led me to think about what I want my role as enquirer to be and how best to get people to talk. Whilst my ego might benefit from going into a group and directing conversation, taking an 'insider' approach might make people feel most comfortable and safe and therefore produce better responses.

Knitting has been contagious and learning new skills has been addictive. After every interview I came away with a new technique I wanted to try or advice about which types of needles to buy. Interviewing similarly-minded women has inspired me to pick up the work with textiles that I had largely put down after the loss of a studio space before the research began. In notes written during the pilot I realised that the research was part of my life and the rest of my life affected the research,

Having gone through a long period of not feeling creative, my hands were itching to knit and sew again. I have spent the last six months concentrating on reading around my PhD topic and hadn't felt I had the headspace or confidence to be creative. After having a turning point in my research and being creative in formulating a research question and shaping a literature review draft and some methodological decisions I feel like I've turned a corner outside my research as well and do want to be creative. I feel like I've got the spirit of enquiry back. I hadn't before considered how my research might affect me and my state of mind and visa versa.

Knitting has played an important role in my life over the last three years as it became the focus of my working life but it has also come to symbolise a process of personal development. I moved to Edinburgh to undertake the doctorate and found the change in my life stark. From working in a communal studio amongst my peers to working alone in front of a computer I experienced both liberation and isolation as I enjoyed the control I had over my time but had to get used to new ways of seeking out the support of colleagues. Knitting and dressmaking offered another component to my identity at a time when my sense of self was undergoing particular changes and offered something tangible alongside the largely intangible nature of my research. I have enjoyed being aware of the materiality of different yarns after a day spent dealing with the uniformity of paper and computer keys. Writing and knitting require

different types of intellectual engagement and provide fuel for each other, creativity sparking creativity.

Looking back further to explore the evolution of my positioning in relation to the research, before commencing the doctorate I would have described myself as a textile artist but not as a dressmaker or knitter. My granny taught me to knit but I do not remember continuing outside her supervision and do not remember seeing her knitting either. As children, during the 1990s, my brother and I received hand knitted jumpers from a family friend but we did not consider them fashionable enough to wear or to keep. It was, therefore, neither a family connection nor fond memories of hand knit items that encouraged me to relearn to knit or fostered an initial interest. Rather, I had always had an artistic interest in textiles, an academic interest in the history of their production, and a personal concern at contemporary and historical notions of femininity. These interests came together in the study of knitting and with that came a desire to relearn the stitches I had (barely) learnt as a child.

I approached the research as an insider in that I shared the experience of making textiles with the interviewees, and this developed the more I interviewed knitters. However, as a researcher I was approaching the phenomenon from an outsider perspective. In the extract above from my reflective notes I recognise an unwillingness to award myself an authoritative position as 'Researcher'. It is, therefore, more appropriate to position myself as 'between' insider and outsider. Rather than viewing the researcher as either an insider or an outsider to the group they study, Rose (1997: 313) argues for a position of betweenness, 'between the 'field' and the 'not-field', between theory and practice, but also between researcher and researched'. This is consistent with my research strategy in that it encourages the researcher to move between macro- and micro-perspectives, to look at themselves and at others, and to consider theory as valuable only when embedded in empirical evidence (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, Patton (2010) argues being an outsider does not guarantee a lack of identification in some way with participants and so should not be viewed as automatically more objective.

The interview setting is an artificial conversation, however much an informal atmosphere was established through the context of meeting in a café. The participant and I had a short amount of time to establish our fleeting relationship and establish our position in relation to each other. This was particularly true if the interview is viewed as a constructive process, shared between the researcher and participant as both engage in discussion and reflection and as the participant's story unfolds (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). In addition to the spatial metaphors favoured by Rose (1997), Griffith (1998: 368) highlights the temporal qualities of the relationship between researcher and researched, describing it 'as a relation that occurs over time'. Some interviewees seemed comfortable and not visibly worried about giving the 'right' answers or how to behave. Contrastingly, during other interviews our relationship evolved and the interviewee became more relaxed as I revealed more about myself. Conversation almost always improved as soon as I demonstrated to them that I am also a knitter or that I was willing to also talk about my knitting. A chance remark about, for example, the latest pattern by Ysola Teague (a local designer), has often been enough to see the participant relax. After one interview, in which there were two interviewees for the first half until one left for another engagement, I wrote in my notes:

I felt like one of them didn't really like me. She came from a science background and whilst I set up she asked whether I was going for a representative cross section of the population. When I tried to explain my different approach I could tell there was a bit of a divide between us. However, once her friend had gone and I could be a better interviewer she warmed and by the end we were just chatting about knitting pleasantly. An example of what she said – that 'knitting provides a link between people'.

In these notes I used 'better interviewer' to describe being able to pay careful attention to what she was telling me and thoughtfully probe for more information in a way that I had not managed to do when I was dividing my attention between her and her friend. I noted that in another interview there

was a difference in the conversation after I had switched my Dictaphone off. After the recorder was turned off the two interviewees took on my role as questioner, asking me why I felt the need to do the research, what was going to happen with my findings and why I thought few men knitted.

These examples illustrate how the relationship between people are not stable but depend on the individual participant, 'the boundaries of insiderness are situational and defined by the perceptions of those being researched', and how these boundaries can be indistinct and nuanced (Labaree, 2002:101). The interviewee's decision described above, unconscious or conscious, to wait until the tape recorder was off to turn my questions back on myself may be telling in terms of how they viewed me. The experience of our relationship as evolving depending on the information I revealed about myself is congruent with writing on the subject of insiderness and research which argues that the position of being an insider should be viewed as to be achieved and then maintained rather than something that is automatically bestowed (Labaree, 2002).

There are advantages and limitations to conducting insider research. A personal investment in the research topic has enabled me to approach the topic with an understanding and a drive stemming from my experiences. Researchers are often motivated by the realisation that current theories are not sufficient to explain the phenomenon they are involved in, they may desire increased self and group reflexivity or a personal journey towards understanding their own identity (Labaree, 2002). This research was a quest to provide an additional understanding of what making textiles meant to women and to stimulate and capture self and group reflections on an activity which can be perceived as familiar and taken for granted. This position of situating myself gives a fresh perspective on the topic combined with a nuanced appreciation of knitting and the chance to develop rapport with participants (Labaree, 2002). The proposition that I could use knitting as a point of reference between me and the interviewee was reflected in my findings and

formed a key thread running through the research project, see for example discussion of relationships between knitters in Chapter 8.

The position as an insider gives the researcher the potential to generate different understandings to an outsider because their shared experiences and knowledge may lead them to achieve greater access, trust and rapport, and the ability to understand fully how the information they are given by their subjects is packaged by understanding technical terms, shorthand references and nuanced descriptions (Labaree, 2002). I noted my experience of 'local' knowledge (Geertz, 2000) after one interview,

There definitely is a world of local knitting designers (Tin Can Knits, Ysolda Teague) that keep coming up, a mini world revolving around [knitting shop owner's name and knitting shop]. I wasn't ashamed to admit to this interviewee that I was quite jealous of the community aspect and she was quick to say it's not exclusive and I should join. I enjoy showing that I know what interviewees are talking about and who they are talking about even when they use shorthand, and do sometimes nod in agreement even if I don't know what they are talking about, I guess partly to get them to open up more or continue talking and not break the flow, but also because I get a good feeling from it. Maybe this is what my participants feel as well? Possibly a reason for talking to me or at least an outcome, and the same for knitting groups- a feeling of solidarity, knowledge, pride, never seem competitive but healthily competitive like feeding off a sense of bettering oneself – I guess this is how I feel too, wanting to know more about it, and feel part of an 'in' group.

I found that a shared interest in knitting acted as a way to develop rapport quickly in the interview, with some revealing personal experiences and a willingness to share the collective experience of knitting with me. In notes after an interview I wrote: *'I felt we got on really well and she invited me to join her knitting group, several times. I guess that makes sense as for her knitting is very, very social...She did ask a couple of times 'hope you got what you*

wanted'. Talked even after I'd turned off tape recorder and stayed for probably 2 ¼ hours'.

In order to interpret a textile and writing or speaking about textiles we need an appreciation of both material and symbolic significance, the 'language' of marks, stitches and words (Goggin and Tobin, 2009), and also the 'language' of that particular individual, i.e. the cultural norms and values *and* the individual's personal language. Attfield (2012) argues that only considering an object, or a piece of writing about an object as bearing a single universal meaning, overlooks the subjectivity in each interaction between person and object/text and reduces this rich and diverse tapestry of values, conventions and experiences into mere static symbolism. In essence it seems that a researcher can benefit from equipping themselves with a wide knowledge and openness to a range of 'languages' including material, sensory, personal, cultural and conceptual in order to get a deeper understanding. This highlights a key change Charmaz (2006) has made to the original grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1967]) in that she argued the knowledge base available to the researcher can benefit their analysis as long as it doesn't cloud their vision when looking at their data.

Griffith (1988) challenges the researcher to ask themselves whether their biography necessarily gives them a more privileged viewpoint than other people. Labaree (2002) has argued that it is all too easy to overlook the hidden methodological and ethical issues that may arise as an insider within the topic they are studying. I might assume that my shared experience with my participants meant that I collected 'better' data than someone who was more of an outsider. I found it was easy to reiterate hierarchies of knowledge by claiming to know better rather than merely to know differently (Reay, 1996; Wuest, 1995). Every researcher has an obligation to honestly represent what they are studying. However, being somewhat of an insider, or at least identifying with the women I have interviewed, it is likely that I will feel an inclination to portray my subjects and knitting itself in a positive light. I am grateful to the participants for donating their time and for sharing their

experiences with me and so want that to produce something that will please them. It is therefore appropriate to pair a position of insiderness or betweeness with a grounded theory approach which provides a structure for the analysis procedure which stresses at all times the importance of responding to the data rather than prior assumptions. Using the qualitative analysis software, QSR*NVivo, also helps counterbalance the potential to overlook familiar things or conversely code for something that is not in the data by facilitating precise coding, experimentation with codes until they seem to 'fit' the data, and memo writing to help the researcher to reflect on and 'audit' their decisions to increase accountability (Richards, 2005). My role in the analysis and reporting will be highlighted by making clear that truth is not the same for everyone (Labaree, 2002). Locating myself in the text will be necessary in order to make clear to the reader the impact of my position on the findings.

3.6 Analysing the data

This section discusses the analysis process used in the third, main stage of the research which consisted of interviews. Analysis of Stages 1 and 2 can be found in brief earlier in the chapter and in full in the appendices. The analysis procedure is designed to progress from many initial codes to some descriptive categories to key conceptual themes to a theoretical framework, as shown in Figure 9 below, and was facilitated by QSR*NVivo.

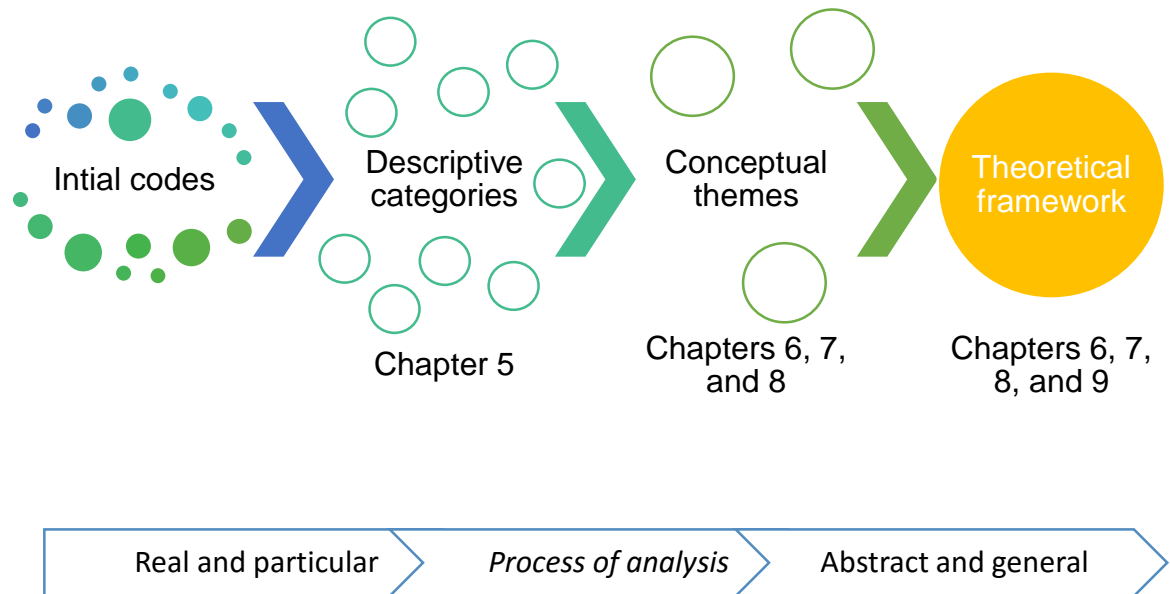


Figure 9: Process of coding data

In line with grounded theory and in response to the experience of using pre-defined coding schemes in the pilot study, Stage 3 did not use a coding scheme (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) advocates a content analysis procedure involving labelling units of data in order to eventually establish similarities and differences and interpret what is being said. This is not an objective process of sorting data to pre-set rules, instead it is me as the researcher who names the data, I decide what is happening and what is important after repeatedly reading the interview transcripts and my reflective notes (see Appendix 4.2 for sample extracts from these notes). There has been some assumption that content analysis is always a statistical method that converts qualitative data into a quantitative form, for example Paoletti (1982:15), examining historical costume, states that content analysis involves an 'unbiased sampling of sources', predetermined categories, and statistical methods. However, this is not true for all or probably most content analysis applications. Although Paoletti's favouring of unbiased sampling and objectivity might reflect the research culture existing at the time of publication, it is important to break down misconceptions and demonstrate procedures such as content analysis can be useful in material culture studies.

The codes in content analysis are formed through a process of defining and redefining in an attempt to 'understand understandings not our own' (Geertz, 2000:5). This requires an analytical and open state of mind which considers both others and oneself,

To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening. To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others (Geertz, 2000: 16).

The personal and interactional nature of analysis is also highlighted by López and Potter (2001:13) who state '[s]ocial science is possible because social life is possible'. In line with the critical realist approach taken in this research they base this statement on the understanding that we all use meaning, understand meaning and communicate meaning. We try and predict events judging why people do things and what their actions mean. Therefore, whilst knowledge is always contextual and belonging to somebody shared understandings are possible, as set out in Section 3.2. The researcher seeks, through the process of analysis, to unpick these meanings to form a theoretical understanding which is subjective and specific to themselves but is nonetheless useful to our understanding of our lives.

The process of content analysis used in this research began with an initial systematic engagement (Charmaz, 2006). This involved repeatedly reading the data and sorting it into descriptive codes (see Appendix 3.4 for the coding tree of initial codes). At this stage the codes were numerous as I aimed to capture the minutiae of the interviews with little interpretation. This is appropriate as a complex situation results in complex data which cannot be reduced until the researcher can identify what is or what is not important to their understanding (Richards, 2006). Next these codes were sorted into categories and subcategories (see Appendix 3.5 for the coding tree for this stage). These categories and subcategories are presented in Chapter 5. Devault (1990:111) calls for 'strategic imprecision' in labelling which gives space for different meanings to emerge through analysis and discussion,

rather than choosing at this stage 'a single word or phrase that will serve ... words that channel thinking, leading the mind down old, familiar roads'. Categories are therefore deliberately broad. There are a number of reasons why a researcher might select a part of the data to include in analysis, such as a number of participants seem to say the same thing, a comment is particularly unusual, participants themselves may suggest a hierarchy of importance of issues, or particular comments might support or disagree with existing literature. This was not always straightforward and required sorting and re-sorting until categories seemed to 'fit' the data (Richards, 2005). These labels were deliberately descriptive to maintain their connection with the data and to avoid, at this stage, producing analytical labels which, whilst attractive, may not describe what is really going on as this only forms during further interaction with the data.

The findings chapter presents a relatively large amount of testimony without interpretation in order to maintain a clear and accurate data trail and in order to let the reader gain an understanding of what participants said before I layer my interpretation over this. Testimony is reported to give the reader something to hold onto and to view alongside my interpretation and analysis. In this thesis the findings of the research are described before analysis, interpretation and discussion. The decision to present the testimony of the women who participated in the interviews with a minimum of interpretation in Chapter 5 was congruent with the aims of the research. These were to present the findings and analysis in a transparent way in order that the reader could see how the theoretical framework was built on the foundations of what participants said. Therefore, the findings and relatively extensive quotations serve the purpose of allowing the reader to see a clear data trail from this to analysis and construction of theory. Saldana (2013:88) refers to description as 'the foundation for qualitative inquiry ... its primary goal is to assist the reader to see what you saw and to hear what you heard'. This descriptive stage is vital in a grounded theory structure in order to help ensure the researcher is really looking and understanding what the data is telling them.

Moving on from testimony to analysis is influenced by the aim of the research to generate theoretical propositions, congruent with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Strauss and Corbin (1992:15) present a traditional positivist notion of theory as explaining and predicting the perceived phenomenon, presenting theory as 'a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomenon'. This research is conducted from a critical realist rather than positivist perspective and therefore adjusts this definition of theory to be congruent with the aim of understanding phenomenon rather than seeking to predict what will happen in the future, in keeping with Charmaz (2006:126) who defines theory as an imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon.

This approach and clear transition between presenting and analysing data is central for convincing generation of theory (Charmaz, 2006). This is supported by Atkinson and Delamont (2006:164) who warn of a trend in qualitative research towards presenting testimony without these further explorations of meaning, arguing 'too many authors are ... too ready to celebrate narratives and biographical accounts, rather than subjecting them to systematic analysis'. Therefore, this research includes both the presentation of testimony and the interpretation of these findings. Atkinson and Delamont's (2006) warning also supports the decision to take a grounded theory approach rather than oral history, for example, as grounded theory offers a clear structure to progress carefully through data analysis with a focus of generating theoretical conclusions throughout the research process. In a similar fashion Bazeley (2009) has argued that the themes generated through analysis are not an end in themselves, as the testimony presented in this thesis is not either. Therefore the decision was taken to also include speculation and discussion of the implications and wider meanings of these themes which is presented in Chapter 9.

The process of coding data could be criticised as inherently involving loss of data and a simplification of complex issues. This is arguably an issue for all

research which seeks to filter everyday life in order to make the process of understanding it manageable. During the process of theming the data it is inevitable that choices have to be made about what is significant and what is less significant and perhaps has less resources allocated or is not developed further. Belenky et al. (1997:3) illustrate this process of selection with a quote from George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*; 'If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence'. Reissman (1987) argues that breaking interviews up into units of data can mean the researcher loses an overall picture of what is happening for the individual and how they structure their story. This is a valid criticism of this research project, however the issue was counterbalanced through repeated reading of each transcript as a whole and coding using QSR*NVivo which allowed me to view both the whole interview and coding at the same time. Through repeated reading of transcripts or listening to recordings (I found it helpful to transcribe the interviews myself rather than outsource the work) the research participants begin to 'live in your mind' and therefore 'you can learn about their meanings rather than make assumptions about what they mean ... Thus gain a more textured, dense understanding' (Charmaz, 2006:35).

These initial stages, resulting in descriptive categories and subcategories formed 'the bones' of the analysis, '[t]heoretical integration will assemble these bones into a working skeleton. Thus coding is more than a beginning; it shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis' therefore enabling the researcher to create an understanding grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006:46). At this stage in the analysis themes were identified which ran through and between the descriptive categories. This stage picked up on intuitive hunches that I had noted throughout the process and developed new themes.

Grounded theory coding is more than a way of sifting, sorting and synthesizing data, as is the usual purpose of qualitative coding. Instead grounded theory coding begins to unify ideas analytically because you

keep in mind what the possible theoretical meanings of your data and codes might be' (Chamraz, 2006:71).

Therefore 'you begin weaving two major threads in the fabric of grounded theory: generalizable theoretical statements that transcend specific times and places and contextual analyses of actions and events' (Charmaz, 2006:46). One way in which grounded theory encourages the researcher to consider analytical meanings throughout is through memo writing – keeping a note of ideas throughout the research process as a way of creatively generating thoughts to apply to the data in the interpretation stages. For example, throughout the research project I kept reflective notes which I used as data in the analysis process and quote from in the thesis to illustrate points. This is encouraged by Bazeley (2009: 20) who says 'the researcher's reflective writing becomes a critical source of interpretative understanding as concepts are dissected and ideas explored.'

After descriptive categories conceptual themes were identified, referred to in grounded theory as theoretical coding. This involved the creation of themes by looking at the relationships between categories and suggesting ways to understand what is happening within them. At this point fragmented data was put back together in new and exciting ways, to 'weave the fractured story back together' (Glaser, 1978:72). Bazeley (2009) argues that theming the data is not sufficient to generate theory and it is in the relationships between elements of the data that analytical thoughts arise. This is the key difference between the contents of the findings and analysis chapters. Key themes are discussed in turn in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

The process of rearranging data and thinking of explanations and connections could continue with no definitive end point. In some respects the point at which an analysis is deemed sufficient is dictated by practicalities. Additionally, Richards (2005) suggests an analysis should have:

- Simplicity;
- Coherence (based on elegance and balance);

- Completeness (it explains all phenomenon or makes clear what exceptions there are and why); and
- Sense (that it makes sense to relevant audiences).

Some of these criteria rely on the skill of the researcher in evaluating the extent to which the analysis could be further simplified or rearranged, for example I completed successive versions of the sorting in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 until I felt the structure reflected the data and worked in terms of limiting overlaps and repetitions. The next section discusses how the process of writing was part of the process of analysis. Other criteria such as that of making sense to relevant audiences required the presentation of ideas to others, particularly the supervisory team and colleagues.

Charmaz's (2006:4) definition of theory as 'an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience' will be used here. A positivistic notion of theory may rely on both explanation and prediction and strive for generality. Contrastingly, this interpretative research aims to create theory which is an understanding of a particular phenomenon in a particular context. This difference in aims is described by Geertz (2000:6) as a 'turn from trying to explain social phenomenon by weaving them into grand textures of cause and effect to trying to explain them by placing them in local frames of awareness'. This research is aimed at generating theory that is based upon an 'imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon' and acknowledges the relative nature of knowledge, it 'assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as inextricably linked; truth as provisional' thus congruent with a critical realist perspective (Charmaz, 2006:126).

Generating theory is in some respects at odds with the premise of grounded theory at the same time as it is the driving aim of the theory. The value of grounded theory research is judged by its resulting theories and wider applications of understanding, yet throughout the grounded theory process the researcher is urged to stay as close to their specific data as possible. This means in the writing of theory (see Chapter 9) the researcher must carefully balance the specific and the abstract, as described by Patton (2011: 165-166),

[u]nlike the usual meanings of 'generalization', an *extrapolation* clearly connotes that one has gone beyond the narrow confines of data to *think about other applications of the findings* ... Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions.

(italics in the original)

3.7 Writing the research

This section discusses writing as both part of the process, and the product, of research (Holliday, 2002). The process of writing the analysis involves a further sifting of what is and what is not important and of shaping and naming categories and themes until the analysis is 'sufficient', as discussed above. The researcher is in a position of power in controlling what the reader reads and what they do not. As Richards (2005) suggests in her criteria for a sufficient analysis, the resulting conclusions must make sense to relevant audiences. Therefore, the writing of the research is an important part of the project in terms of selecting what to include with consideration to the reader. The curated nature of the final analysis is echoed in Gomm's (2004:180) portrayal of writing, 'what is the result is an artefact of the research and that reflects the reality of whatever it was that the researcher set out to capture'. One of the challenges in the process of writing is to create an artefact which adequately reflects the experience of the researcher and the researched and conveys the understandings gleaned through the analysis. The writing process was involved in the analysis in the development of conceptual categories and a theoretical framework.

The inclusion of quotes from the data to illustrate points is useful as the reader can see what was said and how. However, quotes were used with various considerations. Over reliance on quotes could indicate only a superficial discussion of themes (Bazeley, 2009). Themes might have been selected for

discussion because of reasons other than prevalence in the data, for example an issue which was particularly extreme might be examined. When relying on quotes the reader might judge these under-represented themes as insignificant or out-of-place within the analysis. The inclusion of just one key quote to evidence a point should not be viewed as indicative of little evidence. Instead, it is important during the discussion to give some indication as to the reasons why each theme has been chosen for development and to highlight anomalous data.

I aimed to avoid passive writing in order to highlight how, throughout research, all decisions and conclusions are mine and not objective. Likewise, I also strived to avoid making the research process seem mysterious, for example avoiding 'the themes emerged ...' and preferring 'I identified the following key themes which seemed important to me...'. This is supported by grounded theory that encourages the researcher to make explicit their role in interacting with the data (Charmaz, 2006). It is important for the author to find their own 'voice', not in an authoritarian sense, but in the sense of taking ownership of one's subjectivity, and acknowledge that it is deliberately and not innocently used (Carter, 2011). Editors Guy et al. (2001) demonstrate one way to acknowledge and use the author's 'voice' by asking each contributing author to end their article with a reflective paragraph entitled 'unpicking the seams', discussing how they undertook the research or writing in order to make the often hidden academic process more visible. The contributing authors used this opportunity to variously describe practical or methodological issues or to articulate emotional responses that arose during the research. The editors, Guy et al. (2001), then used these 'unpicking' paragraphs to compile their own summary and reflective chapter at the end of the volume. Their volume consisted of multiple layers of narrative, reflection and analysis in contrast to a traditional single layer of text, and eroded the boundary between the authoritarian voice of the academic and the reader. This plurality has been positioned as a way to challenge the established conceptual system by using existing boundaries and language to be understood yet simultaneously encourage change (Sellers, 2011). Therefore, my aim throughout the research

process, including the writing, is to make clear my own reflections – methodological, practical and conceptual.

A downside of using writing as part of the process of analysis is that presenting the analysis in a static final form in the thesis masks the previous iterations which exist in previous versions. To somewhat open upon the evolution of the themes presented in the analysis chapters, Chapter 6 opens with a short exposition of one of the key moments in the writing process. This involved a progression from two themes (knitting alone and knitting in groups) to three (creativity, productivity and social interaction). This change marked a vital realisation as I recognised that participants were not presenting knitting as existing in two forms (individually and in groups) but instead similar themes ran throughout the various context in which they knitted.

3.8 Quality: Transparency and credibility

This section outlines the ways in which the quality of the research has been enhanced through a rigorous and transparent process producing a credible analysis. The research continues in the spirit of Miller and Fredericks (1999: 538) and Charmaz (2006) in that it ‘better situates grounded theory as an increasingly credible and epistemologically defensible procedure within qualitative enquiry’ through a rigorous research design and execution. Bryman and Bell (2011: 710) encourage researchers to establish how they have ensured their research is of a high quality, ‘We need to get away from the idea that ... the desire to persuade others of the validity of our work are somehow bad things. They are not ... The question is – do we do it well? Do we make the best possible case?’

The research was designed according to criteria derived from Patton (2010) in order to enhance credibility. These criteria include trustworthiness, authenticity, accountability, reflexivity, triangulation, and particularity. Although

traditionally research might have been assessed using the terms 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' Lincoln and Guba (1986) argued for a new language which replaces these values with 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity'. Where quantitative research relies on the quality and execution of a measuring instrument to produce a high standard of conclusions, qualitative research relies on the researcher as the 'instrument'. Therefore, the quality of the research relies on the skill and rigour of the researcher. This comes at some cost as the research can be affected by events in the researcher's personal life or flaws in their competence. However, the advantages of using the researcher as the 'instrument' are that they can respond flexibly to the data collected and adjust the research design according to unexpected things happening. This is built into the research design in line with grounded theory methods. The researcher can include subtle or intuitive responses in their analysis, picking up on behaviour or attitudes that could not be measured by a quantitative method.

The trustworthiness of the research is defined as the extent to which it 'feels' true and real (Patton, 2010:548). It encompasses validity, defined as 'the accurate representation of features of a phenomenon that an account is intended to describe, explain, or theorize' (Hall and Callery, 2001:258) but acknowledges that part of this judgment has 'a *feeling dimension* which is every bit as important as the cognitive dimension' (Patton, 2010:548). The critical realist perspective taken in this research means that although knowledge is contextual, it is possible to judge, to some extent, the accuracy and usefulness of theory (López and Potter, 2001). We judge between theories depending on which we think more accurately represents reality, something we have to do all the time in our everyday lives as well as in research. This is supported by Gomm (2014:299) who argues '[r]esearchers may disagree as to what the 'truth' is and how to get at it but they are all subject to a moral requirement to do research truthfully.' Thus, trustworthy research results in 'truer and truer (truth is not absolute) accounts of reality' (López and Potter, 2001:12), contributing to an evolving knowledge base.

The trustworthiness of the research was potentially effected by social desirability bias – interviewees providing answers they anticipate will be desirable (Patton, 2010). The participants were keen to support the research and likely to try to provide useful information. They also discussed wanting to publicise positive aspects of knitting which may lead them to present it in a certain light. Steps were taken to reduce this effect such as reassuring respondents of anonymity and not engaging with participant's questions about other respondent's answers prior to their interview. The extent to which responses capture the reality they were meant to was increased through steps such as allowing participants to choose a location where they might feel comfortable, and allowing them to expand on topics and direct the conversation if they wished to (Gomm, 2004). For example Bridie chose to talk to me about the history of knitting in Scotland, not perhaps as relevant as some other interviews, but nevertheless reflecting her relationship with knitting.

As has been discussed throughout the chapter, a grounded theory approach is designed to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis by 'grounding' it in the data and encouraging a careful and systematic process of analysis to reduce the extent that preconceived ideas affect what the research 'sees' in the data. However, there are hidden assumptions that tend to go unacknowledged and are difficult to remove from the research. We are all bound to be affected by the cultural, social and political contexts in which we live. To combat this, each idea that stems from previous experience or from the existing knowledge base had to 'earn' its place in the analysis and was only used to help the researcher look at the data, not to shape the analysis. Authenticity is defined as 'reflexive consciousness about one's own perspective' and other people's and fairly depicting them in the writing. It is also achieved through producing analysis which is 'embedded in lived experience' (Patton, 2010: 546,544). These values were adhered to by striving to accurately report what people told me and my own thoughts. The research stemmed from participants' own words and reflection on their experience of knitting. The interviewing schedule was designed in order to leave space for

participants to use stories and memories to communicate meaning and to clarify and amend points.

Grounded theory has been criticised for failing to consider reflexivity and the power dynamic between researcher and researched (Hall, 2001). This has been combatted in this research by both the introduction of reflexive notes and a consideration of positioning. Reflexivity is defined as ‘an acknowledgement of the implications and significance of the researcher’s choices as both observer and writer’ (Bryman and Bell, 2011:715). It includes both philosophical self-reflection – thinking about your own beliefs and assumptions, and methodological self-consciousness – thinking about your relationship with who you study. These values were adhered to by articulating my own experience and stance and considering how this might affect the interpretation of the data. Section 3.7 is included in the thesis to explore the nature and impact of my relationship with the participants. The grounded theory process has reflexivity built into it as there is constant movement between suggesting an interpretation and returning to the data to test it (Miller and Fredericks, 1999).

Being reflexive has involved interrogating my own views as I did my participants’,

Reflexivity is not achieved by the use of the first person or by the expedient of constructing a text which situates the observer in the act of observation. Rather it is achieved by subjecting the position of the observer to the same critical analysis as that of the constructed object at hand (Bourdieu, 1984).

The dangers of shaping data to fit existing concepts is summarised by Charmaz (2006:68), ‘[i]f you reframe participant’s statements to fit a language of intention, you are forcing the data into preconceived categories – yours, not theirs.’ I have attempted to reflect throughout on why I think certain things and make certain decisions in order that the reader is informed of my personal

perspective. This process was documented in a research log (see Appendix 4.1 for extracts).

Triangulation and particularity are related concepts in social research requiring a balance between breadth and depth, specificity and diversity. Triangulation can be used to describe the use of different methods to test a hypothesis, but in the case of interpretative research instead refers to 'capturing and respecting multiple perspectives' rather than seeking one truth (Patton, 2010:544). This is consistent with the research approach used here which has sought to stress the different ways data can be interpreted. Particularity, 'doing justice to the integrity of unique cases' was enhanced by including themes based on criteria such as importance and unusualness rather than only themes which appeared multiple times in the data. Participants were recognised as individuals by including some written portraits, using (anonymised) names rather than numbers, and using their own words to illustrate points where appropriate. It has been highlighted throughout the thesis how the analysis presented should be viewed in the context of these individuals, congruent with Patton's (2002:563) assertion that '[k]eeping findings in context is a cardinal principle of qualitative analysis.'

The research was conducted with accountability. In qualitative research this relies on an element of trust between researchers as there are not the same codes of practice as there are for quantitative researchers. However, this section has demonstrated how it is possible to establish criteria for enhancing and evaluating the quality of qualitative research. Patton (2010:177) suggests this openness is key to producing quality research, '[t]o be able to judge the credibility of research, readers need to be given information as to how it was conducted'. This is easier in research such as surveys which are protocol driven. In the context of the semi-structured interviews used here this is somewhat taken on trust, it would be difficult to provide readers with all questions asked, for example. However, transparency has been enhanced wherever possible by, for example, including the broad interview schedule and the original transcripts in the appendices. Although no participants accepted

my offer, they were given the chance to edit their responses before they were analysed, consistent with an open research process.

The data was not falsified and the resulting theoretical conclusions were developed with a grounding in the data meaning there are clear links between theory and evidence. Accurate conclusions might be reached without this grounding but not accountable conclusions. The research was conducted from the stance that researchers should be value-free. This means I believe I, as researcher, am accountable to the research community first and foremost rather than researchers who believe they are primarily accountable to the group being studied (Gomm, 2014). Although I respect and value the participants in my study I believe it is through being accountable to the research community that rigorous and credible research is ensured. This led to a tension between the obligations I felt towards the research community to draw upon everything my participants had told me and the intention, discussed above, to give participants the right to choose which of their words I did and did not document and analyse. The issue did not arise as such as no participant retracted anything from their interviews. Had any participants retracted anything I felt that, for the time immediately after collecting the data, participant's rights over-ruled that of the research community. However, once analysis has taken place, providing adequate steps to ensure anonymity and sensitivity had been taken, I felt the words of participant's had entered the domain of the research and researcher.

By articulating some of the changes in my thinking, for example the evolution of the final key themes, it is hoped that the reader feels that conclusions are built upon the solid ground of good observation. I was keen that the reader did not see categories as being plucked out of thin air but based on what people told me. Ultimately, some of the requirements of brevity and a focus on devoting space to the analysis, meant I was having to balance how much detail to go into in these discussions. There may be some benefit in experimenting, in future research, with using technology to animate this process and better

give the reader(/viewer) an impression of analysis as an interactive, iterative, creative and systematic process of careful observation.

Overall, the rigour of the research was ensured by conducting the research with integrity, through ensuring anticipated analysis has not shaped the findings, making explicit my assumptions and predispositions, a systematic search for alternative explanations and circumstances, and different ways of organising data that would lead to different things (Patton, 2010).

Summary

This chapter has sought to enhance the transparency of the research and, it is hoped, to strengthen the reader's faith in the subsequent findings and analysis by setting out how the research was conducted in a systematic, reflective and rigorous manner. The research takes a critical realist approach and is based on three 'loops' between data collection and analysis, influenced by grounded theory methods. This process is aimed at generating an analysis which is based on the data rather than pre-conceived ideas or hypotheses. The chapter has discussed three stages of data collection, including a pilot, email questionnaire, and interviews. The research seeks to understand the lived experience of a sample of knitters who are living in Edinburgh and who hand knit for leisure. The chapter also discussed my position in relation to the participants, as a researcher and a knitter. By setting out the empirical process of data collection and analysis this chapter demonstrates how the research contributes to existing knowledge by striving to avoid perpetuating existing concepts and stereotypes present in the literature without first finding them in the comments of women themselves. In the spirit of further enhancing the credibility of the final conclusions the next chapter provides an insight into the first two stages of the research that have been set out in this chapter.

Chapter 4 Skills, memories and the joy of making: Initial themes from the pilot study and questionnaires

Introduction

This chapter ends Part 1 of the thesis by briefly describing the key themes that resulted from analysing the findings from the pilot study (Stage 1) and questionnaires (Stage 2). These are outlined here in order to contextualise the main research stage reported in Part 2 of the thesis and highlight how each stage was designed in response to the results of the previous one(s). After the key themes are presented each section ends by setting out the core issues which the next stage of data collection was designed to explore further. There is little reference to existing literature in this chapter as literature was predominantly only introduced during the later stages of the analysis after the interviews were conducted. This is congruent with a grounded theory approach and aimed at ensuring analysis is not moulded to fit pre-existing ideas (Charmaz, 2006). The chapter begins by discussing key findings from the pilot study including data relating to productivity, skill and creativity, identity and sociality, and different types of textile makers. The second half of the chapter contains findings from the questionnaires, relating to everyday life and identity, the joy of making, gender and family connections, and routines.

4.2 Key themes from the pilot study

This section briefly outlines key themes resulting from analysis of Stage 1, the pilot study. As described in Section 3.3.1 and in Appendix 2.2.1, the pilot study

consisted of an analysis of five blogs and an instructional knitting book (Greer, 2008), reflective writing after observing a knitting group, and analysis of an unstructured interview using two pre-defined coding schemes. The key themes discussed here are productivity, skill and creativity, social interaction, and the different types of textile makers.

4.2.1 Productivity

The knitting group members in the pilot study easily identified 'feeling productive' as a benefit of knitting and discussed the satisfaction of seeing their knitting grow as they worked. One member said she enjoyed knitting so much that she felt sad each time she finished a project and usually had numerous things in progress to avoid feeling bereft with nothing to knit. Another member joked 'it stops me committing murder'. Members agreed that they did not like doing nothing with their time or just watching television without their knitting.

In the instructional book the author implied she did not have full control over the decision to make things, for example: 'some people...are **meant** to donate their time, knowledge, skills' [my emphasis], and 'I couldn't *not* do something' (italics in the original), implying a compulsion to knit (Greer, 2008:2,3,9). Abigail, the knitter interviewed in the pilot study, similarly spoke of needing to knit and it being part of a ritual that she went through every single day no matter where in the world she was (she travelled a lot for work). In the knitting group they spoke of feeling in a certain frame of mind when the knitting just flowed and when they ended up staying up late as they kept saying 'just a few more rows' to themselves or their families (in relation to this the notion of 'flow' will be developed in Chapter 6). Two members spoke of having to reduce their knitting when their hands became sore and another showed me that she had a dent on her finger from using a cable needle, a short extra needle used to move stitches over and under other stitches to get a pattern resembling twisted cables. These may have been displayed as marks of pride or a demonstration

of their commitment, however they seemed more like frustrations with their own body's failure to keep up with their knitting.

One member of the knitting group raised the issue of a work ethic in relation to productivity, stating that she had got hers from her mother who she remembered knitting every evening. Another recollected when her children were young she used to be able to put the evening meal on and know how much knitting she could do in the time until it was ready and be able to keep an eye on the pot as well as knitting. Considering the decision to spend leisure time doing an activity for other people, a knitting group member said that something 'hormonal' in women might contribute to them wanting to make things for their children or other people.

The oldest member of the group said her mother was from Shetland and so she was taught to knit at the age of five and was expected to do so whenever she could. Her hands were twisted with arthritis after seventy years of knitting and she now only worked on small projects to prevent them being too heavy for her to hold on the needles. Throughout the session she knitted continuously, with tiny, efficient movements and a hunched posture born out of these years of such activity.

4.2.2 Skill and creativity

The instructional book seemed to speak of craft and creativity as skills or potentials that could operate almost autonomously, commenting for example on 'expanding your relationship with craft', 'set it free', and 'it found me' (Greer, 2008: 4,5,9). Craft and creativity are presented as something to be taken 'in hand' as if they have the potential to become out of control (Greer, 2008:5). This seems to imply that everyone has these abilities and that it is about learning to both control your creativity and set it free. Elsewhere the author suggests she could only take risks once she had the security of feeling like she fitted in with a group of likeminded people. There is a sense in the book that

knitting is about locating oneself in the present but also as part of a progression into the future in which you hopefully will 'grow' (Greer, 2008: 130). Perhaps this is into a better person, a more skilled knitter or into a lifestyle which we feel has a better 'fit' with 'your own life' (Greer, 2008:6).

Abigail, interviewed in the pilot, described her knitting as a 'labour of love' to indicate the effort often required to keep knitting once projects had become tedious, when she had made mistakes, or produced something that was unwearable and must be unravelled completely. She appreciated the challenge that knitting offered her and wanted to accumulate enough skills to make a jumper with wool she had processed herself. The blogs analysed in this stage often reflected a similar attitude to challenge and skill acquisition by posting detailed descriptions of pattern alterations. One blogger (House of pinheiro, n.d.) referred to a 'creative journey' to describe her intention to acquire and refine her skills. In particular, the author of *My happy sewing place* (n.d.) explicitly focuses on each new skill she acquires and seems as interested in researching patterns and techniques and understanding their historical provenance as she is in making them, linking both this theme relating to skill with issues discussed below regarding making links with women who made textiles in the past.

Contrastingly, skill or creativity was not discussed at the knitting group, with members instead focusing on productivity. The absence of the term 'creative' in the discussions of the knitting group compared to the other sources in the pilot study is striking and provided an interesting lead to explore during the later stages in the research. Notions of creativity and whether knitters see themselves in this way eventually formed a key part of the final analysis (see Section 6.2).

4.2.3 Social interaction

In the instructional book knitting was portrayed as a way to connect with your true or inner self, for example knitting helped the author 'explore my own creativity and identity' and 'literally 'craft my life'' (Greer, 2008:10,12). The distinction between what one makes and who one is is blurred; 'it can become part of your everyday life, your personality and your beliefs' (Greer, 2008:4). In the social context of the knitting group members talked not only about their knitting but a diverse variety of personal and local news. One member said she had been taught by the group so perhaps their conversation was moved away from specific techniques because of my presence. Another seemed proud of what she had made and happy to talk me through how it was put together. Another member was asked what she was making and she told the group. However, this was brief and didn't reference stitches or technical details. This may have been because they all knew these details and so it was too basic to mention. They chose which projects to bring to the group carefully as they did not want to bring a project which required intense concentration which meant they would 'miss out on the gossip'. Members talked about getting home and realising they had made mistakes that needed to be unpicked because they had been distracted by conversation during the group. Given that the knitting group did not talk about wanting challenging knitting in the same way as the interviewee this may indicate different people go to knitting group as do knit at home, depending on their motivations to knit. It presents an interesting situation that women should choose to knit together despite the potential that this will hamper their knitting.

The group seemed to have a shared knowledge. They referred to people outside the group by their first names who were presumably husbands and children. They seemed to know some of each other's personal circumstances such as where they lived and what their jobs were. They often did not explain to me who or what they were talking about. This made me feel like they were temporarily considering me as, if not an insider, then at least not a complete

outsider. The author of the instructional book explicitly referred to the benefits of being part of a community saying, after not finding other social activities where she ‘belonged. . . I had no real idea where I fit in’ until she attended a knitting group (Greer, 2008: 9).

Although the blogs were online there was a striking sense of community, with other makers commenting on each other’s blogs, providing links to each other on their pages and organizing to meet up in real life, sometimes travelling internationally to do so. Interaction was deliberately invited by some bloggers, who ended their posts with questions for readers to answer in the comments section. Readers are invited to join in-person meet ups, seeming to require no previous direct interaction to take part. They all used photographs, often of themselves, to document their work. Seeing what they looked like and having options to contact via other social media sites made them seem more ‘real’ and ‘authentic’, and I soon forgot the trust issues that surround the internet. The cover of the instructional book, showing a globe made out of fabric made me note, *‘[A]lready the small handmade world makes me think that the book will talk about linking people around the world, and perhaps challenge the perceived anonymity of globalisation.’*

The author of the book seemed to make a connection between giving handmade things to someone and physical contact or protection where there is none. She likens the act of making to the act of touching and the gift of a handmade object a way of touching and showing care which can bridge cultural taboos and physical distancing, ‘connecting with family, friends, and others in your community’ (Greer, 2008:4). She says that craft can ‘transcend societal differences... you can still let your stitches do the talking’ (Greer, 2008:5). This implies that handmade objects have a universal understanding which does not require a shared language or cultural knowledge. By doing something like knitting we can ‘learn about the daily experience of the millions of women who have taken up their needles before me... [and] connect with women of previous generations’ (Greer, 2008:12). Although Abigail, the interviewee, did not attend a knitting group she still spoke of feeling connected

to other women knitters. For example, she had started conversations with strangers who she had seen knitting in public, making temporary connections that way. Additionally, a sense of continuity with women from the past was important to her.

When analysing the blogs I noted that often in the 'about' section women choose to mention their families, and present themselves as dividing time between their knitting or sewing and their other responsibilities. For example, after reading one blog I noted *'The 'about' section is a little apologetic for the time she spends making things and ends with saying that when not doing this she is a mum to her sons moving the focus from herself to her family'*.

4.2.4 Different types of textile makers

When a member asked me about my background and I mentioned a fine art undergraduate degree a member of the group was quick to say that they (presumably the group as a whole) had all agreed they did not like it when people covered things like trees in knitting, referring to 'yarn bombing'. They said it was graffiti, a waste in yarn, often not skilful, and wondered who cleaned it up. This might indicate an emphasis on value achieved through skill and a good use of the materials. This observation helps support the decision taken in this research to focus on knitters who are not necessarily represented by existing research which has sometimes focused on knitters who do so for political reasons as those in the knitting group not only were not interested in craftivism but actively sought to distance themselves from it.

As the group were packing up one member remarked she had attended a different knitting group once but had left quickly as she hadn't liked it. She was searching for how to say why and another member suggested they were 'snobby', but she settled on 'competitive'. There was a feeling of pride that their knitting group was not like that, particularly from the more vocal member of the group. I felt it was important to them that they were seen to be welcoming and

accommodating, in distinction to this 'other' group. I don't know whether this was partly due to their meeting place being a library, a public building which was allowing access and refreshments for free (rather than, for example, a café), or a reflection on the group members. That a member had experienced a different atmosphere elsewhere suggests not all groups are like this one, and perhaps people attend for reasons other than support.

One of the blog authors expressed her approval for the diversity of contestants represented in the recent BBC series, *The Great British Sewing Bee*. She implies that in the past this has been a community which has not tended to be diverse but is now encompassing people of different genders, ages and social classes. Although not referring to knitting, we might assume she would have a similar opinion of knitting as tending to be associated with women who produce knitted garments out of necessity. Greer (2008:5) presented knitting as way to connect with diverse groups of people and did not distinguish between knitters in the way the knitting group did, saying knitting can 'transcend societal differences'.

4.2.5 Key questions raised by pilot study

Once the findings from the pilot had been analysed and the themes discussed above were arrived upon some key questions were identified that seemed to stand out from the findings as particularly interesting or notable but that remained to be answered including:

- Productivity
 - What return do the knitters get for their investment of time, money and effort, in the activity?
 - Why do they spend their leisure time in something which can be hard work?
- Social interaction

- How might knitting be a process of self-improvement, self-development, and/or self-actualisation?
- How is knitting part of women's sense of identity?
- Is the knitting community open to new members or exclusive?
- How do the knitters define themselves?
- Do all knitters feel it connects them to other people?
- Why do people join knitting groups?
- Methodological questions
 - How can I elicit thoughts on what role knitting plays in knitters' lives if it is so familiar to them that they cannot imagine not knitting as a comparison?
 - How can the meaning of knitting be conveyed through storytelling about knitted items?

These questions and issues influenced the decision to use questionnaires in the second stage of the research and interviews in the third in order to, in turn, gain broad and focused responses. The above questions shaped the questionnaire which sought to explore what and when people knitted. Furthermore, the observation that people told stories about their knitting led to the inclusion of a question which gave the respondent the opportunity to write about the favourite things they had made.

4.3 Key themes from the questionnaires

As discussed in the previous chapter, Stage 2 was developed in response to issues and questions raised in Stage 1. Respondents were asked why, where and when they knitted and made textiles, and to recall a favourite item they have made. This stage was analysed using QSR*NVivo and resulted in key themes, making textiles as part of everyday life and a sense of identity, the joy of making, gender, generation and family, and routines. The section ends by raising key issues to explore further in Stage 3.

4.3.1 Everyday life and identity

Responses suggest that knitting was part of everyday life for the questionnaire respondents and hint at the strength of the relationship between their identity and their knitting. For example,

You put so much of yourself into something you are creating, it becomes much more than a cushion or a blouse it becomes part of who you are ... If I see something I have made I can remember making it and what life was like during that time (Q6).

Similarly, Q3 suggested that memories were knitted into the final object,

I finished a blanket for my daughter recently for her single bed. I worked on it over the course of a year (in between smaller projects). Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring are all wrapped up in that blanket - holidays, car journeys, evenings in front of the fire, illness - all of those memories are in that blanket.

If, therefore, knitting is part of some women's everyday lives, triggers memories about the past, and potentially becomes a part of who they are now, I wondered what 'knittter' as an identity meant (if it meant anything more than doing the activity), and how it interacted with the knitter's conceptions of herself, how other people saw her, and how she wished to be seen.

Two of the responses indicated a compulsion to make things, '*Because I have to, its [sic] like breathing its [sic] the only thing I do. I couldn't stop doing it even if I wanted to. Too much inspiration, too little time*' (Q1) and '*they [projects] can be all-consuming*' (Q3). These comments reflect Abigail's comments in Stage 1 where she said she 'needed' to knit every day. There was a need expressed to be doing something and not wasting time, whether whilst watching television or waiting to collect children. For example, '*I get very fidgety if my hands are not doing anything*' (Q9).

4.3.2 Joy of making

Knitting was described as relaxing but also challenging, fun but also hard work, for example, *'I find it on the whole very relaxing and an ideal way to unwind'* (Q8), *'I find the creative process of making things with my hands relaxing and satisfying.'* (Q7) and *'It was a joy to make as the yarn and pattern and colours were so nice to work with'* (Q4). Additionally, one respondent said she enjoyed being able to make something unique for her and her family. Two respondents made comments which suggested they valued the autonomy and control they experienced through creativity, *'I love the idea of 'making' in a world that forces us more and more to a passive life and role'* (Q9) and *'I love to be creative. I love the idea that I can make something beautiful and practical with my own hands'* (Q3).

4.3.3 Gender, generation and family connections

When asked to recall a memorable project the respondents often wrote about things they had made for family or friends, for example, *'A rainbow baby blanket for my god-daughter... I love seeing how it's used every day'* (Q4) and *'I remember making my first jumper when I was a child. I knit it for my father when I was about 5 years old.'* (Q10). Another wrote about a memory of a grandmother, *'I made it in honour of my granny - Bessie. Bessie's blanket started me on the path I am now, I've come a very long way from granny squares and still have a long way to go'* (Q1). Additionally, another respondent wrote about the relationships she had built, saying *'Since I have been blogging I also get a huge amount of pleasure/ fun/ support/ friendship'* (Q12).

4.3.4 Routines

The respondents tended to knit during the evenings in front of the television. Some talked about other creative activities, such as sewing, which tended to be done in specific spaces or times. For example, if sewing was done at the kitchen table some respondents said this was restricted by times when the family needed to use the table for homework or at meal times.

4.3.5 Key questions raised by the questionnaires

After the above key themes were identified in the questionnaire responses issues and questions were developed which stood out as seeming pertinent to the research questions and which required further investigation to understand in more depth. These themes and questions helped shape the interview schedule used in Stage 3 of the research.

- Everyday life and identity
 - Being a 'knitter' as an identity:
 - What does it mean to be a knitter beyond the ability to knit (if anything)?
 - Are there shared characteristics of knitters and do women seek to identify themselves with knitting because of these characteristics? Are they more likely to be certain types of people that take up knitting?
 - How do women position themselves in relation to other knitters?
- Joy of making
 - Relaxation, challenge and productivity:
 - Is it important to knitters that they are producing a useful end outcome?

- Is knitting an ideal activity to fit into our busy lives? Why do we dislike 'not doing anything' other than watching television in our leisure time?
 - To what extent do knitters seek a challenge?
 - Do knitters find parts of their knitting tedious or frustrating and if so, why do they keep doing it?
 - Do knitters use knitting in different ways depending on their personalities and when they are doing it, for example to relax or to be engaging or to make something unique?
- Gender, generation and family connections
 - Memories of family and friends (respondents often talked about favourite objects as being gifts for people they had been close to):
 - How can we understand questions about the role that knitting plays in women's lives by asking them about the items they have made and the people they were made for?
 - Connecting with other makers
 - Do younger people still associate knitting with their heritage as women?
- Routines
 - Use of time
 - What is the nature of women's time spent knitting – do they think of it as work or leisure, fun or labour, and what value to the place upon this time?
 - Do knitters have other things they would do with the time they currently spend knitting? Is knitting prioritised over other things or just something that fits in with other activities?
 - If knitting is continuous does this feel like maintenance or is there still a progression in skills and experience? What is the target or reward and is there ever an end point?

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of key themes that arose from the analysis of Stages 1 and 2 of the research. This is included in order to demonstrate to the reader how each Stage was designed to explore particular issues arising from the previous one, as outlined in Chapter 3.

Analysis of the pilot study, Stage 1, suggested key themes such as self-expression and identity-building, social interaction and belonging, the considerable investment knitters make in their hobby, and to raise the idea that memories and storytelling might elicit reflection on the meaning of knitting in women's lives. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, Stage 1 resulted in methodological outcomes such as the decision to take a grounded theory approach to reduce the influence of pre-conceived ideas, and the decision to collect primary data rather than rely on secondary sources.

In response to these outcomes, Stage 2 consisted of email questionnaires with four simple questions built around why, where, and when people knit, and their favourite knitted item. This was designed to provide space for stories and memories, to see if knitters talked about other people, and to see how much time and space in their lives they devoted to knitting. Stage 2 resulted in themes including creating an identity as an individual and as part of a community; memories of friends and family; labelling of time spent knitting as 'work', filling spare time, and knitting that can be both/either relaxing and challenging. These themes informed the design of an interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews conducted in Stage 3 through the creation of a broad interview schedule to explore these issues. The decision to conduct interviews was influenced by the inability to probe for a deeper understanding, and gain feedback on my understanding, in the questionnaires.

Part 2 Developing themes: Main findings, core analysis and discussion

The second part of the thesis contains the main body of primary research and analysis that builds on the contextual information detailed in the first part. This begins by describing findings from the interviews (the third research stage) which suggest that knitting plays an important part in the lives of the women interviewed as they made a considerable investment of time, funds and emotional energy into the activity. Tessa even described her knitting as '*fundamentally part of me*'. Analysing the findings resulted in three core themes being identified; creativity, productivity; and connecting with other people. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 contain an examination of these themes, building on the findings presented in Chapter 5 and also drawing, to a lesser extent, on the results of the first two stages of research, reported in Chapter 4. The final chapter of the thesis summarises and concludes the research. This chapter includes a reiteration of core elements of the three analytical themes in order to set out a theoretical framework which considers the wider implications for our understanding of how we form and communicate our sense of self and what women look for in their lives today.

Introduction to the analysis chapters: from two themes to three

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present and discuss three key themes that were identified in the data (presented in Chapter 5) focusing on the second half of the analysis procedure, shown in colour in Figure 10 below (the colour green denotes conceptual themes and theoretical propositions are in yellow). It was decided that it would be useful for the reader to take a moment here to explain how these themes and the corresponding arrangement of chapters and sections was arrived upon. Each theme is introduced with some relevant key findings

in order to highlight how the analysis follows on from the data, congruent with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). The themes were created through a systematic process of labelling, grouping and ungrouping chunks of the data until a structure had been produced that seemed to best represent and interpret what participants said about their experiences of knitting.

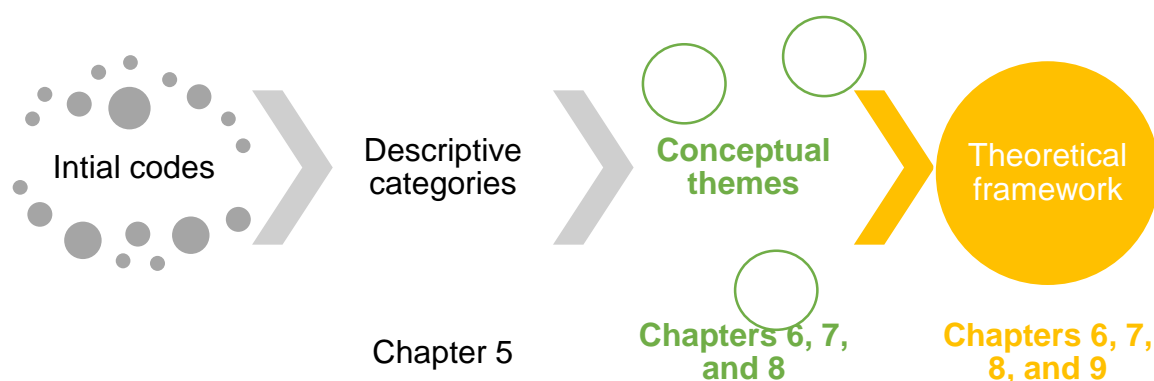


Figure 10: Location of conceptual themes within the analysis procedure

As discussed in Section 3.7, part of this process of analysis took place during the writing process and therefore the reader cannot see the previous iterations of conceptual themes that are buried in previous drafts. To give the reader an insight into this process a key moment in the drafting process is described here. This was chosen to be included as it represents a point at which organising the themes differently reflected/ provoked (it is difficult to discern which came first) a significant conceptual progression as I altered my perspective from seeing identity as created in different ways when the knitter was alone and with other people to seeing identity as something that was directly and indirectly social. These ideas are expanded upon throughout the rest of the thesis.

Initially, it seemed that participants were talking about two different types of knitting, one that took place alone and the other that happened in knitting groups and with other people. Therefore these formed the two original core themes in the analysis. Through repeatedly returning to the data, a process of trial and error and developing a more detailed understanding through subsequent edits and re-writes I came to realise that dividing the data into knitting alone and knitting in groups did not feel like it was accurately representing what knitters had told me. It felt arbitrary to divide the themes this way as I felt 'creativity' and what was later termed 'productivity' stood on their own as themes rather than being at their core about knitting alone. Furthermore, it emerged that the idea of interacting with other people and creating identity ran throughout the three themes and was not limited to social interaction within knitting groups. This demonstrates how the process of categorising, changing and splitting themes is not purely aesthetic but productive of new insights and conclusions. Having three themes did not 'feel' like it fitted with the data and further interrogation and experimentation revealed new understandings that did.

In order to provide an insight into an earlier arrangement of two themes the contents of each is briefly listed here. 'Knitting alone' contained the following findings which were later split between 'creativity' and 'productivity' as core themes that replaced the initial one theme of knitting alone:

- 'Creativity and reflecting on self' included a discussion of different types of knowledge involved in creativity and the different types of creativity, sub-themes which now both provide a core part of the theme 'creativity'.
- 'Challenge and problem solving' discussed notions of serious leisure and the value of craft and labour. As I developed an understanding of how the creativity offered by knitting and the challenge of difficult projects were intertwined these findings were split between the 'creativity' theme and the new theme, 'productivity'.

- 'Roles and obligation' included findings relating to the ways knitters used knitting at times of change, and their avoidance of idleness. These sub-themes were eventually developed within the theme of 'productivity' which enabled a discussion both of producing identities and productive work.
- 'Knitting as a process of standing out' contained a discussion of autonomy which was later discussed in relation to creativity as my understanding developed. This theme also included findings relating to the idea that stability stemmed from a 'knitted autobiography' of past projects and a stash of yarn for future ones. These findings are now included in the theme 'productivity'.

The second core theme contained a discussion of knitting alone with other people or involving other people. The contents of this theme were changed far less than the previous one (later two). However, the theme was conceptualised differently as I viewed direct social interactions as only one way of interacting and creating identity. This theme originally contained the following sub-themes:

- 'Bonding and bridging' included many of the ideas still present in Chapter 8 surrounding how knitting facilitates relationships. However, this section also looked at unifying norms and values amongst the knitting community, ideas which were later developed using notions of cultural and economic capital in a sub-theme of its own.
- 'Social capital' looked at how knitting was an ideal tool for social capitalists to build supportive networks. This discussion remained throughout the analysis process although was developed into a more nuanced understanding using the work of Putnam (2000) and Bourdieu (1984).
- 'Divides and distinctions' turned attention to the differences between knitters and non-knitters and between different types of knitting. This section became less prominent in the analysis through a more detailed

interrogation of the data and of notions of capital, so the section was integrated with the discussion above of the values encouraged by the knitting community.

Chapter 5 Routines, techniques and abilities.

Knitting ‘is fundamentally part of me’: Key findings from the Interviews

Introduction

This chapter contains the key descriptive categories that were generated by the initial coding process. To put the findings into context, an overview of the participants can be found in the introductory chapter. In line with grounded theory methods this chapter aims to report findings descriptively with little interpretation in order to curb ‘our tendencies to make conceptual leaps and to adopt extant theories *before* we have done the necessary analytical work’ (Chamaz, 2006:48). Initial descriptive coding has taken place which has organised the data into broad themes. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, here an emphasis was placed on labels which described what was in the data rather than interpreted it. At this stage Charmaz (2006: 48) encourages the researcher to ‘code with words that reflect action’ and therefore the categories presented here are framed as questions to describe an active probing of the data and to help maintain a descriptive rather than interpretive attitude when I looked at the data. These questions were generated after initial codes were organised into groups of those with similar types of content. Figure 11, below, illustrates the position of these categories (included in colour in the diagram) within the analysis procedure. This chapter builds a picture of knitters who are deeply committed to their hobby and believe that ‘*you can make yourself happy by making things*’ (Penny).

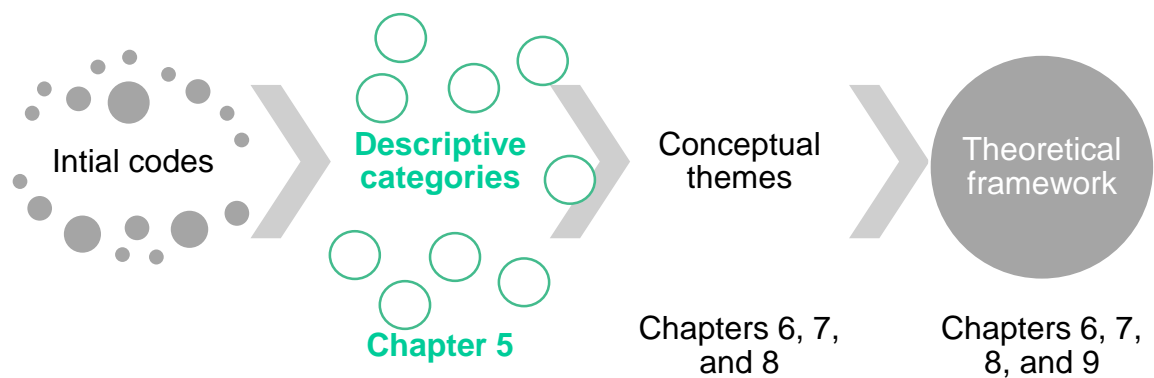


Figure 11: Location of descriptive codes within coding procedure

5.2 How and why did you learn to knit?

The participants tended to have learnt to knit whilst they were under the age of 10 and either have kept knitting since then or, more commonly, stopped knitting as a teenager and restarted in their 20s or 30s. Contrastingly, Gemma learnt to knit for the first time in her 40's. Some were taught at school and some were taught by their mothers or grandmothers. Vicky said that she had learnt at school beginning with the same pattern for mittens that other people she had spoken to had used. This conjures a humorous image of hundreds of uneven and unfinished mittens being produced by each year of school children. Vicky also remembered a school teacher who wore Aran cardigans (a style of knitting coming from the Aran Islands and characterised by off white wool and cable patterns) which her pupils would stare at whilst she was writing on the board in order to spot the mistakes in the knitting pattern. Vicky and her friends must have had a degree of expertise in order to 'read' the stitches and spot the mistakes.

Not all participants enjoyed knitting whilst children. Some said they did not take to it immediately because it was considered uncool or they associated it with their mothers and therefore resented having to do it. Some who asked to learn as children were influenced by seeing their mothers and grandmothers knitting, contrasting with those who were put off knitting because of a familial association. Eva remembered asking one of the assistants in her parents' shop to teach her to knit after seeing yarns on the shop shelves and being attracted by the bright colours. Those who learnt as adults, or returned to knitting after a break, sometimes used books and the internet to teach themselves. Those who stopped knitting at some stage or stages during their lives attributed the break to conflicting interests, most commonly education or work. Having young families was also presented as a time when less knitting, or less complex knitting, was done. However, for other knitters, knitting was consistent throughout life-changes such as becoming a mother, as will be discussed further below.

Some participants wanted to learn to knit because of what benefits they thought it would bring, such as anticipating it would be relaxing or help deal with insomnia. However, this was a relatively small number and little emphasis was placed on starting to knit for its potential therapeutic benefits. A couple of knitters found themselves without a hobby and took up knitting to fill this gap in their lives. For some taking up knitting again after a break seems to be triggered by a change in circumstances including a new job, leaving university and moving to new cities, becoming pregnant or having friends and family who were pregnant, for example *'I learnt when I heard I was going to become an aunty I decided it was an aunty-ish thing to do'* (Ivy) and *'it just seemed to be that when I got pregnant I had this vision of producing knitting for this baby'* (Debra).

A chance encounter with knitting was sometimes an impetus to learn, such as seeing a friend knitting, a newspaper article or a knitting shop. Sometimes the decision to learn, relearn, or become more committed to knitting was not entirely their own. Nancy remembered a work colleague who *'said in a very*

Teutonic way you knit very badly in an inefficient fashion I will teach you'. Other encounters with particular places sometimes affected the participant's relationship with knitting, for example Elaine began to knit more when she moved to Scotland, attributing this to both the availability of local, natural fibres and to the chilly climate. Contrary to what I expected only a couple of the interviewees said they specifically took up knitting to make things for themselves to wear.

There was a sense of constantly learning and progressing through a knitting 'career'. It is perhaps surprising, given the many online tutorials and instructional books, that some of the participants attending knitting classes. Only Kay actually began her learning at a knitting class, others went to learn more complicated techniques. Laura saw knitting classes as an opportunity to for inspiration and motivation in addition to technical assistance,

I got into the whole thing of knitting workshops where you could go and be with people who are just so good at it so clever and I like that being in a group with people who are much better than me and who can inspire me on to do better things.

Ten of the knitters mentioned teaching other people to knit. On the whole they said this was an enjoyable process, for example Elaine mentioned feeling proud that someone she had taught is now an '*obsessed knitter*' and Chloe enjoyed their gratitude, '*they're so grateful when they need help its lovely*'. Gemma spoke about how she enjoyed '*sharing*' knitting with others, particularly those who seemed to be able to become competent quickly and those who surprised themselves with their ability. Contrastingly, a couple of the interviewees said they did not enjoy teaching people, for example Hazel said she was not a very good teacher but did try and help people at her knitting group when they needed it.

5.3 How do you knit?

This section discusses data relating to the practices and routines of knitting discussed by the interviewees. Some worked spontaneously whereas others enjoyed carefully planning projects. For example, Penny said that *'rather like as a practising artist you know that sometimes you're fiddling with materials and you're thinking oooh I could do something like that'* which was a welcome contrast to her work where she *'was a workaholic...very structured and I had a very responsible job'*. Contrastingly, others such as Olive enjoyed being organised and planning ahead what patterns to make and what yarn to buy, *'I'm quite strict with myself in that I only have one project...on a daily basis I would check Ravelry to look at what patterns have been uploaded...so I'm quite organised'*. Some more spontaneous knitters did discuss planning if the project was intended as a gift.

Most were working on multiple projects at the same time, often at different stages or of complexities so that they had knitting to suit different circumstances and moods. A smaller number of knitters said they were *'quite strict about working on one thing at a time'* (Ivy) or *'I tend to restrict myself I have one project and I also have a procrastination project'* (Olive). Ivy and Olive used the terms 'strict' and 'restrict', seeming to imply a process of self-management and restraint, notable in a leisure activity.

During the interviews there were few explicit references to the financial cost of knitting. However, some hinted at this, by expressing guilt or humour regarding the large amounts of yarn they purchased. Hazel said she did not let herself spend very much on yarn but others spoke about buying more expensive yarns after becoming more experienced. Beth and Kay describe shopping for wool as joyful and encompassing a range of senses, *'It was just like my heart started beating faster and I went and touched all the stuff'* (Beth), *'like a kid in a big sand pit'* (Kay). Gemma said that what she bought was not necessarily under her control, *'I don't necessarily get a choice in the matter wool tends to pick me rather than the other way round so it's just like you can buy me now and*

take me home' (Gemma). When I asked the knitters about their 'stash' most said, sheepishly, that they had a lot of yarn stored in various places around their homes. This was a source of concern for some of them such as Laura, *'sometimes it seems bad to me'*, and some were trying to consciously use some their stash rather than buying more yarn. Others were comfortable with their stashes, for example Tessa commented upon special yarns, *'there'll always be yarns that are too special to knit and they live in your stash'* and mentioned an acronym used in the knitting community - 's.e.b.l.e.' meaning *'stash enhancement beyond life expectancy'*. Tessa also remarked with humour that if she was made redundant and could not find another job immediately then she could continue to knit with good quality yarn even if she was living on a reduced income as she could draw from her stash rather than shops.

There was a general consensus that acrylic yarns were to be avoided, both for practical reasons, *'itchy and not very nice'* (Rosie) and influenced by personal taste, for example *'kitsch tacky stuff...really awful acrylic furry jumpers'* (Gemma) and *'[my mother] instilled a suspicion of any synthetic materials'* (Penny). However Debra acknowledged acrylic was good for knitting for children and *'a quick fix if you want to knit a stupid scarf'*. In contrast, natural fibres were portrayed as more luxurious, an 'investment', and also as an ethical option by supporting local producers. Natural fibres seemed to be what many of the knitters thought 'proper' knitters used. Gemma and Debra seem to attribute low value to knitting projects which have been produced with cheaper acrylic yarns, seemingly warranting less investment of time. Rosie was unique amongst the sample in expressing surprise at the tendency amongst knitters in the UK to avoid synthetic fibres, saying that in Chile, where she is originally from, synthetic yarns form most of the market and are considered the 'normal' option. Whether knitter's taste or the buying decisions of yarn companies came first, it is notable that the association between natural fibres and 'good' knitting is not inevitable, although might also be attributed to a history of sheep farming in Britain.

Participants were asked about their most and least liked parts of the knitting process (including planning, buying materials, different stages of knitting and finishing). Eight said they enjoyed finishing, although most of these preferred other parts of the process. Yvonne, for example, said she enjoyed getting to show off the finished knitting and Cathy also talked about feeling proud of a finished piece. Contrastingly, Debra commented that she did not *'get a particular rush'* or sense of relief from finishing something and instead was more excited by starting a project. For some the enjoyment in knitting came before it was even cast on. Jane commented about her tendency to plan in life and her knitting, *'I do really enjoy planning, I'm a definite planner in life as well'* and Bridie similarly said *'planning is the most interesting really, I suppose because you're kind of thinking about it'*.

As their most enjoyable part, most of the interviewees discussed the actual process of knitting itself, times such as starting, progressing, *'evolving'* (Kay), *'whenever something like grows and you can see it start to take shape'* (Jane), or finishing. Surprisingly, Daisy seemed unsure as to whether she enjoyed the actual process of knitting as it required less input than the planning stages, *'I enjoy the planning and the getting the wool and getting started, seeing how I get on and I don't know that I would say that I really enjoy, well I do enjoy the knitting cos you almost do it automatically'*. Another aspect of the process which was picked as enjoyable, but not the actual knitting, was anticipation of the next project, *'it's the shiny things it's the starting what's the next shiny thing to distract me it's all about possibilities so many projects'* (Debra).

When asked what their least favourite bits were most knitters talked about boring and repetitive aspects of knitting. Olive, for example, said

when you've started it it's very new it's exciting and then you start to think right I wish it would hurry up because I'm sick of it and I want to do something else.

There was little discussion of other parts that the knitters disliked, although a few spoke about weaving in the ends and blocking (both done after the knitting

has been cast off to shape and finish the item). Badly written patterns annoyed the knitters and difficult techniques or problems were temporarily frustrating until solved. Gemma felt the process of trial and error involved with working out her own pattern was frustrating,

if I'm following a pattern I enjoy it if I'm trying to make up my own it can be quite stressful and I tend to do a lot of unravelling and if I've just unravelled the last 2 hours of work then it can be quite pointless and I can feel more infuriated than I did when I started.

The sample was divided in how participants viewed mistakes. Some described themselves as being '*Zen or balanced*' (Beth) who did not mind ripping back their knitting after making a mistake and others preferred to ignore errors. Elaine portrayed unravelling knitting as a release of tension if she was unhappy with the project, thinking '*oh I'll just rip it out I can't deal with it anymore*'. Ivy said that having completed knitting that was left unworn because of mistakes in it was '*sadder than unravelling something*'. Hazel was happy to leave mistakes, putting this down to being a '*process knitter if I were a product knitter I would be more of a perfectionist*' implying she was motivated more by enjoyment of the process than producing a perfect final outcome. Three interviewees explicitly mentioned feeling guilty about their knitting. For Beth knitting was a way to avoid feeling guilty for watching television rather than working, which links with other comments about not wanting to be idle or waste time. Gemma told me she had a '*confession*' that she had recently bought a very expensive ball of yarn which she branded '*special stash extra guilty*'. Contrastingly, Olive remarked that she felt guilt if she did not enjoy knitting something which was to be a gift. Talking about a baby blanket which her friend had requested be a very plain design, Olive said,

it was the most unjoyous [sic] thing that I've ever made and I really struggled to be motivated... I feel dreadful thinking that but I just felt that I couldn't put any creativity into that blanket...[it was] quite tedious I did

resent it but I felt so guilty about it and I still do I still feel guilty that I made this thing.

Similarly, there are some projects that the knitters have not finished because they have lacked enthusiasm and working on them has felt like a chore. They can also feel like this about knitting that is repetitive, including times when the pattern has been chosen by someone else and is not to the knitter's taste. Some knitters said they felt they *should* work on a project again, or felt obliged to finish something they had started.

5.4 When do you knit?

The knitters had various patterns of knitting and some had other commitments which could impinge on the amount of time they had available for knitting. Five of the interviewees said they knitted during their lunchtimes at work and Beth, Elaine and Gemma had all knitted at the cinema. 15 knitted whilst travelling or during other spare time such as waiting for something and 24 interviewees said they knitted in the evenings at home. Knitting seemed to be integrated into the everyday lives of a number of the knitters. Many did not set time aside for knitting, other than to attend knitting groups, and instead fitted it in when they had an opportunity. For example, Laura said *'I guess it sort of fits into a spot in my life and it's an intersection of relaxing and socialising...it just fits in'* and Kay similarly said knitting fitted in with her lifestyle. Although some said they did not miss knitting if they did not do it for a while, Elaine commented, *'if I don't knit every day I feel like something's missing'*. Zoe, a priest, talked about deliberately not taking her knitting with her on her yearly retreat, saying *'one of my disciplines is that I don't do anything I don't read I don't knit I focus completely on my retreat and I desperately miss knitting and actually for me it's a real sort of discipline'*. Ivy said that although she did not miss knitting she disliked not having a project in progress,

it's not so much that I feel there's an absence when I get to the end of a project I don't like not having another one lined up I like to sort of know what I'm doing next so that there's no gap and there's always something to knit if I feel like knitting.

Two interviewees said they used knitting as an acceptable way to detach themselves from boring situations. Gemma knitted during seminars which she was not enjoying and also in social contexts,

I don't drink so I knit in pubs I do drink but not cheap drinks so I basically I'll have one or two drinks and while everybody's having their third, fourth, fifth pint I'll be knitting and the conversation deteriorates so...it's a way of being anti-social that I find socially acceptable I can sit and be knitting something and it doesn't matter.

Gail commented that it could be inappropriate to knit in some social situations in other situations she could use knitting to occupy herself if she was bored. For example she spoke about encouraging her parents-in-law to see knitting as socially acceptable so that she could knit during her father-in-laws slide shows,

I think I would choose the occasion ... the people who don't think it's rude, I have conditioned my in-laws to think it's normal of which I'm very proud because my father-in-law does these huge long slide shows after dinner that make me want to kill myself and I sit there knitting and I have something else to do.

Debra mentioned that having knitting needles in her bag might create a different impression than she wanted to in professional contexts, *'I was going to a meeting where it wouldn't have been appropriate to open my bag and have a pair of knitting needles in it'*. Whether to knit in social situations seemed to be a nuanced decision, carefully judged so as not to offend people. Around people who did not know about knitting or who were not close enough friends, knitters restrained themselves from knitting, for example Debra said *'I would*

love to [knit] people tend to find that quite rude so sometimes if I go for a coffee and ... I'm itching to knit but I know that people react to it I think again because they don't appreciate that you can do it unconsciously'.

Debra, who as part of her job presented to audiences and ran workshops, was comfortable with people knitting during them but acknowledged knitters might miss parts of discussion,

I think to them [non-knitters]...it's hard to imagine that you can be creative so unconsciously and therefore you must, if you don't knit, then you must think that person's attention is in what they're doing and a little bit of me thinks that's a good point because there are regular points when you're knitting even if you're knitting something very straightforward you know you've got to check and if there's any sort of repeat in the pattern you've got to do that counting and if you are really focusing on something else you will drop stitches so even though I would love to I can understand people's reaction to it.

Similarly, Gail said that if a friend was telling her bad news or was upset she would not knit. Although several interviewees knitted in public, Daisy and Eva said they would feel self-conscious doing so, *'I wouldn't take it on the journey to work because somehow I think it looks a bit odd some people do sit and knit in the canteen at work but I don't think I would be comfortable doing that it's just if you've got time to yourself'* (Eva).

Gemma knitted in the winter but preferred outdoor activities in the summer, but no-one else discussed replacing knitting with another activity. Some said that their jobs meant they did not spend as long knitting as they would like to. When comparing knitting to other similar creative activities a minority of participants thought knitting was the same as the other activities they did. Most thought knitting was different because it is what takes up most of their time, it is portable and it can be done in short sections of time. Kay commented that with other crafts she was *'not as obsessive I don't think because it was controlled because it was dependent on whether you could get the tools'* and similarly

Nancy stopped doing woodwork because she did not have the space for it in her flat. Laura did not make clothes as much as she knitted because she could not achieve such a good result, sewing *'something that looked a bit more homemade than handcrafted'*.

In notes after one joint interview with Daisy and Eva I considered how the extent to which knitting was embedded in women's everyday life might lead them conversely to downplay its significance due to over-familiarity,

I didn't feel like knitting was a deliberately or overtly important thing to them or that they even necessarily felt they were 'knitters', however they couldn't imagine being without it, they 'just did it'.

Only Elaine explicitly identified knitting as a lifestyle, *'it's definitely my lifestyle some people are hobbyists'*, although several others similarly referred to it as part of who they were rather than simply something that they did. Knitting is involved in the interviewee's everyday lives, relaxing at home, socialising, waiting for appointments, travelling, listening to lectures, *'I fall asleep knitting and I wake up knitting'* (Kay). Knitting is often carried just in case there is a spare moment and there were a couple of comments regarding missing knitting, *'if I don't knit every day I feel like something's missing'* (Elaine). Others attached agency to their knitting or yarn, or presented it as something outside of their control, for example Tessa said *'I have to say sometimes your hand is just led to it'*, and similarly Gemma said *'I don't necessarily get a choice in the matter wool tends to pick me'*. Whilst these interviewees may be to some extent avoiding taking responsibility for their spending on yarn by portraying it as outside their control, other interviewees displayed similar attitudes towards their knitting as a whole as an addiction outside of their control, *'it's very useful if you need a yarn fix in a hurry'* (Amy), and *'I have to, it's like breathing, I couldn't stop even if I wanted to'* (Q1). This could suggest they feel knitting is powerful, more than a hobby but a way of life. The instructional book analysed in the pilot study similarly presented knitting or creativity as something with its own agency which could take over your life, for example saying that knitting *'found me'* (Greer, 2008:9).

5.5 Who do you knit for?

The interviewees knitted for themselves but also often for other people, as gifts or informal commissions. Penny knitted for her family members more than herself. She talked in particular about choosing complex patterns to knit for her sister who, as another knitter, is '*extremely hard to impress*'. Nancy thought that when making a gift both she and the receiver were rewarded. She made a cardigan for a work colleague's son and enjoyed seeing him wearing it,

he showed me a picture of his baby son wearing it and I'm not interested in children at all but it was just really sweet to see him wearing it and that he'd been really touched that I'd made it for him so I was pleased that he was pleased it was a nice feeling.

Olive liked how making gifts meant she could give items personalised to the receiver, for example she made knitted versions of different rock samples to give to a friend who is a geologist. Penny summed up the special quality of a handmade gift, saying '*I think the labour of love idea is something really nice in our society and it's far away from the sort of materialist scramble...as you can get.*' Similarly, Gail told me how she knitted lace shawls for her female friends and family, starting with her bridesmaids and then her mum and aunty, as a way of saying thank you to them for their friendships in a '*meaningful*' way.

There was discussion about the potential pitfalls of knitting gifts for people. Kay and Nancy said that sometimes people had asked them to knit something for them not appreciating the cost in money and time that would be required. Rosie only made things for people who would appreciate the effort that had gone into them, people who Tessa referred to as '*knit worthy*'. Ivy reflected wistfully about a jumper she had made for her nephew, '*I only ever saw him wear it once*'. Beth commented that a misjudged gift could negatively affect a relationship,

when you do something that takes so much love and energy and time and if they don't appreciate it then you're like well what's wrong and it makes you mad and then they feel like they're obligated and it really shouldn't put stress on relationship it's like saying I love you too early.

Daisy and Eva debated how much people really appreciated their handmade gifts or whether they as the knitters benefitted more,

in a way I think it's an addiction for yourself you know you can't stop knitting you don't want anything for yourself and you think well I'll knit something for somebody else and probably it's second whether they actually want it or need it...it's you that needs to knit it (Eva).

Zoe similarly said she made things for other people because she had enough for herself and Beth said she did not actually wear knitted items herself.

Tessa and Fran said they had made a decision to knit things for themselves after realising they were spending most of their time knitting for other people. Olive said she knitted more for herself than for others as she wanted to be better at knitting before she did many gifts. In relation to knitting for themselves both Olive and Gail used the term '*selfish knitter*' to describe being a knitter who made things for themselves.

5.6 Why do you knit?

The knitters talked about having various motivations to knit including being creative and learning skills, wanting to be productive, and enjoying the experience of making and of using the finished functional product. For some the process of knitting was as important as the final product. For example Debra said the pleasure of knitting sometimes overrode practical considerations resulting in '*something that nobody is ever going to use but that's fine cos I'm knitting in the moment*'. She said projects tended to begin being about the end product but the items that she finished were ones that

were interesting to knit. Hazel also sometimes knitted for the sake of knitting, resulting in *'skinny scarves which are quite useless'* and Abigail spoke of getting carried away whilst knitting the yokes of jumpers (the patterned part around the shoulders) so that they would end up with strange proportions.

Although most emphasised the importance of the process of knitting it also seemed important that knitting had a functional result. Chloe remarked that although some of her knitting might have the same care and preparation as an artwork it was the functional aspect which set craft apart from fine art. Particularly in relation to gifts the knitters were pleased to see an item they had made in use, for example Beth said that she would be pleased if someone wore a gift from her so much that it started to fall apart. Some interviewees particularly enjoyed doing something which produced a physical product as this contrasted with their working lives during which their efforts had largely intangible outcomes, for example Rosie remarked she enjoyed that if she put in the time *'it literally grows into something'*. Some participants also liked making something unique, picking unusual patterns and altering patterns to make them suit them, for example Debra said *'it's not like dressing in a particularly innovative or whacky way but it's just nice to have some little things that are different'*. Environmental considerations about mass produced clothing and accessories in contrast to hand knitted objects was talked about in great detail during the interview with Daisy and Eva, however none of the sample directly linked their decision to knit to this concern.

Some knitters said they *needed* to do something that was creative, for example Jane spoke of knitting to *'keep feeding that part of my brain and not let it... wither away'* and Gemma said *'I do need to have a creative element in order to be sane it's absolutely essential to being healthy'*. There was also much discussion about the form of creativity knitters thought they were using. They discussed not being able to draw or create something new but that knitting offered a more accessible form of creativity for them.

Participants spoke about knitting being a physical and aesthetic experience as well as an intellectual task. Laura spoke about the yarn; *'I love the feeling of*

these lovely yarns running through your fingers' and Debra talked about the motion of knitting, *'I don't know what the word is its more it's in its own setting and an extension of your own space and extension of the body creating this nice fabric'*. Other knitters also made comments which seemed to present knitting as a way to create a personal space and to feel grounded, for example Penny said knitting *'puts you in a personal space you're in control of'*. The knitters talked about using it as a deliberate barrier between themselves and others or their environment, particularly if they were in someone else's space, such as visiting parents-in-law or waiting in a bank, for example, *'I totally disconnect from the world'* (Rosie).

Almost all knitters said they found it was relaxing, although they noted it could also be frustrating. Most seemed to see the challenge, pride and satisfaction which came from their knitting as perhaps more therapeutically beneficial than the relaxing properties. Penny spoke passionately about the potential uses for knitting in occupational therapy and seemed proud that she had taught her children to *'understand that ...you can make yourself happy by making things'*. Other knitters mentioned feeling proud of their achievements and that it was time for themselves, *'it feels luxurious rather than a job to do'* (Gemma).

Although sometimes easier knitting was useful, for example if it was to be done during a knitting group or lecture, most said that if there was not enough challenge in a pattern it became boring. Knitters talk about enjoying that knitting has small progressions, with new stitches built on combinations of old ones. Other knitters preferred to be challenged in the planning stages of their knitting but have an easier knit, many chose to have different projects running consecutively that offered different levels of challenge to suit different moods and circumstances.

In Stage 1 some of the knitting group were surprised when I asked them why they knitted and found it difficult to answer as it was something that they had always done. I was not expecting similar answers from this sample as they had self-selected and therefore, it could be assumed, felt they had something to say to me. However, the seemingly passive statements about knitting

surprised me, for example Beth said that she did not like to wear knitted garments herself and so for her knitting was a way of *'making work for myself keeping myself busy for some reason just making myself 'do' I suppose'*. Olive, who in other parts of the interview demonstrated she was deeply passionate about her knitting, conversely said *'it's just a way to pass the time'*.

Some knitters discussed the impact knitting had on their lives, for example Jane, an experimental physicist, commented she was now more confident doing practical activities such as setting up experiments. Debra said she had previously thought of herself as *'anti-craft'* and not creative until she started knitting. Others spoke of how knitting was good for them because it forced them to challenge certain personality traits such as being a perfectionist and setting high standards for themselves or achieving a better work-life balance by providing an alternative to working in the evenings.

Whatever their motivation most knitters had to keep motivated during boring and repetitive parts of patterns. Jane and Olive talked about the need to be determined to overcome these periods. Despite owning a yarn shop and knitting a great deal of her time at work and at home Elaine said there were times she lost motivation with certain projects if she did not regularly return to them, *'I need to pick it up again actually maybe tonight because it's been sitting there for too long and I feel like I'm going to lose my motivation'*. Gemma said that guilt kept her knitting when she thought about the cost of the yarn she was using and the possibility of it going to waste if she abandoned the project. Likewise Hazel said she kept going with things that had got boring because she did not want to waste the wool.

Daisy, Eva and Gemma said that they knitted because it was a way to avoid some of the negatives of mass produced clothing made in third world countries, contrasting with Pentney's (2008:n.p.) assertion that knitting is *'individualistic apolitical consumption'*. There was little indication that the interviewees were knitting to make an explicit political statement, and those who acknowledged associations between knitting and low value domestic work did so as an aside from their main motivations to knit. This contrasts with Fields' (2014:150)

findings that members of a knitting group were 'changing the face of knitting and revitalizing the activity for a new generation'. Fields (2014:151, 152) sets up an contrast in his article between 'new' knitters, who are young, politically aware, 'more creative, agentic, and modern', and 'old' knitters saying 'knitting's aesthetics are shifting from rocking chair to riot grrr!'. The juxtaposition between 'grandma's knitting' and politically savvy, young knitters may have been visible in the knitting group Fields studied, but in my sample there was not such a distinction. They did seek to distance themselves from knitting with acrylic, or knitting they deemed kitsch, but most of the knitters, from a varied age range, did not think that knitting entirely consisted of unwanted Christmas presents before the stitch n bitch movement.

5.7 Do you feel part of a community?

Much of what knitters have said seems to indicate that knitters feel part of a community which can extend beyond knitting groups, facilitated by the internet but also amongst those who have little direct contact with other knitters but nevertheless have a sense of belonging or shared identity. Knitters seem to feel a sense of solidarity or commonality even if the community is disparate. This is evidenced when people speak of inviting knitters they have just met to attend groups or recommend patterns to them, and sharing with them a kind of language and local knowledge of designers, patterns, and shops. For example, speaking about meeting a stranger who was also a knitter Ivy said '*I quite enjoy that because I think it's a nice sort of activity to share with people ... and I do try and convert people to knitting in the round*'. Elaine enjoyed identifying someone as a knitter because they are wearing something hand knitted or because it had come up in conversation. For example, remembering meeting a friend she said '*we were working in a shop and we got to be buddies and then we both discovered that we both knit and then it was like we were besties...it cements your friendship...it always comes up somehow or if not then I'll have my knitting out already*'.

There was a sense that although the knitting community isn't necessarily visible or clearly identifiable one, there was a local community surrounding shops and individuals. In my reflective notes I have spoken about feeling increasingly invited into and encompassed by this community when knitters spoke to me about the same local designers, shared techniques with me, and also spoke in particular about one person, who I have also interviewed, who has been instrumental in the development of a local knitting community specific to Edinburgh, more specifically to Leith.

Not everyone in the sample attends a knitting group, but the majority attend at least one and placed importance on the social side of their knitting, many valuing and protecting their knitting group night from other activities or commitments. The knitting groups they spoke about tended to have 10 to 30 members, predominantly women, who meet in local pubs and cafés. They were mostly associated with a local yarn shop and tended to be run by particularly influential local knitters. Members of these groups often referred other members to me or told them about the research. A few of the sample explicitly mentioned an influential person in their knitting career who had guided them through knitting or inspired them to learn new things and who a community seemed to revolve around. For example, Laura made a point of adding at the end of the interview *'there have been a couple of people who have inspired me to new stages of knitting'*.

Reasons for joining knitting groups included to meet like-minded people and for technical support. For example Jane got help from other knitters, *'it gives you an opportunity to get advice and get in contact with people who've done things that you haven't done'* and Sophie enjoyed socialising, *'I like meeting people that's fun for me so I like the fact that it's big it's vibrant it's changing'*. Fran and her daughter used a knitting group to meet people when they moved to a new country, *'we moved here knowing no one in the city so that was really the way...we get out and have a community is because of that group'*. Elaine pointed out that knitters could be lonely, *'well it can be a solitary activity you know because you're just working on your own but it's quite nice to come*

together and kind of chat and you know for motivation' and Beth said that knitting groups made it a '*communal experience with an individual product*'. Nancy spoke about enjoying the acceptability of knitting when she attended knitting groups or weekends away. She said it was nice that people didn't comment upon it as everyone was doing the same thing. This might suggest that she does not enjoy the conversely unusual nature of being a knitter in the rest of her life and perhaps suggests some of the motivation behind contacting other knitters, talking to strangers who are knitting etc., is to feel part of a community.

As well as meeting like-minded people at knitting groups some participants enjoyed sharing knitting with a diverse group of people. However, it seemed that there did need to be enough of a shared outlook for the group to feel cohesive. For example Debra attended a group in the past and enjoyed meeting the knitters but said that because they were all retired, whereas she was still working, she did not feel she fitted in, '*I think the ideal group would be a group of women who were international [and that] there were enough professional women in it*'.

Not all the knitters I spoke to were, or wanted to be, a part of a knitting community. Penny, for example, said that for her knitting was '*a sort of solitary therapy really it isn't sitting there knitting squares for Oxfam it's a technical process I want to learn*'. Although Penny made an association between knitting groups and knitting for charity requiring little technical engagement, only Elaine mentioned that this took place at her group and she was herself a competent and technical knitter. Some knitting group members deliberately take simpler projects, or only took complicated projects to show other members before returning to projects requiring less concentration. Kay said conversation distracted her from knitting at knitting group, '*it's such a misnomer that you're doing something that makes you not concentrate to do the thing that you want to do*'.

In addition to a contemporary community, some of the interviewees spoke about how knitting linked them to previous generations of women or family

members. Vicky, whose mother and father were both involved in the Scottish textile industry said *'you do start to wonder, well is it something inside you'* and Fran talked about her pleasure in passing on knitting, *'I love that I get to share that with my daughter'*. Penny talked about using knitting to recapture her happy childhood when she was taught by her mother. Olive said that she talked about knitting with her mother, who also knits, but that they had different styles,

I think she's more intrigued I don't think that she would necessarily take on everything that I do she's quite set in her ways she'll maybe make baby clothing for friends who are about to become grandmothers or friends who have children or she'll do charity knitting.

Gemma told me that when her grandmother was unwell and her eyesight was deteriorating Gemma posted her some luxurious wool that would be soft to the touch, referencing their connection as knitters.

For some there was no interest in knitters from the past, however others cited several reasons why they were interested, including a practical interest in learning techniques to apply now. Olive said she did have a practical curiosity but could not see an application now, *'I like learning [from the past] but it's not necessarily directly related to anything that I'm doing at the moment'*. For Debra being aware of women's history and connecting to it through knitting presented a way to learn other things and mark moments in time,

I think also there's a lot in it about the resilience of women ... and that sense of you can talk while you're knitting even though people don't because its distracting but like needlework, Anne Boleyn waiting to be executed and Mary Queen of Scots waiting to be executed, it's there in all the stitches.

The interviewees made a distinct connection between women and knitting. Some discussed how they were pleased to see men were taking up knitting, but most had not met a male knitter or knew only a small number who had attended their knitting groups. Gender did not frequently come up in the

interviews, although Laura mentioned she thought being able to multitask by knitting and talking was a '*female thing*'. Similarly Gail said her husband was interested in her knitting and '*he's not someone who's frightened of transgressing the gender roles but at the same time he's never asked me to teach him but then he can't multitask so that might be why*'. Gemma experienced a '*great sense of fellowship*' through her all female knitting group. Similarly, Gail welcomed the opportunity to spend time with other women. She said that the knitting community might be unintentionally intimidating for men,

one of the appealing things about knitting is that there's an online community that is predominantly female ... so I guess it is still mostly female but male knitters are always welcome but they would have to be essentially, they would have to be comfortable in female spaces because it is still a female space and you know likewise the one time I went to St. James' park [a football ground] it was a male space.

There was some reflection in the interviews regarding the association between knitting and femininity. For example, Beth described knitting as '*still in a box with femininity*'. A member of a university knitting group, she had been annoyed when knitting had been grouped with societies offering other traditional and non-traditional feminine activities such as pole dancing and baking. Beth also commented that knitting patterns tended to cater for a narrow definition of masculinity, describing the narrative as '*why don't you knit a skull on it cos men like skulls*', she thought designers were '*really looking at this [gender] in a very two dimensional way*'. Eva commented on how knitting could be dismissed as a women's activity,

it's something that people don't put any particular value to it's just something that women especially older women do I know it's become a lot more popular with the young people as well so maybe that's changing but certainly you know men of our generation they just go it's

women's doing it...knitting and generally the domestic arts have been kind of downgraded over the years.

Gail similarly said that knitting had not been considered to have a high value or be of interest,

one of the reasons I was interested in helping you with your project is that... it's a female craft guys do knit but it's always been domestic female so you don't, it's not documented in the same way and so when you go to a random local museum up north and there's old knitting there it fascinates me to see how they do it ... and also as part of women's history and the fact that it's something that is unstudied when god knows how many sports science places exist.

Debra agreed and also pointed out that men were involved in knitting but as influential designers,

it's always been principally about women even though a lot of men can knit and there's a few high flying knitters people like Kaffe [Fassett] and Steven West as well there's a couple of male famous designers but on the whole its predominantly about women.

Tessa had received negative comments regarding this association, with men asking her '*are you like a spinster*', as had Kay who has had male colleagues '*sneer and I've had comments like you'll make someone a good wife cos you're knitting*'.

Most of the sample had at some point been knitting in public places and strangers had started a conversation or had looked curiously at them. This may be because knitters are doing something familiar and so feel approachable, for example Nancy said '*I think it's viewed as a productive activity and is therefore acceptable, people can be quite charmed and engaged by it and want to talk about it*'. Sometimes people started conversations because seeing knitting being done had evoked childhood memories of seeing mothers and grandmothers knitting. Other interviewees said older people were sometimes interested because they were surprised to see a younger person

knitting, especially in public, or because they were knitting on circular needles (which might have been unfamiliar to them if they remembered learning or watching family members knitting on straight needles). Others may have just been interested by something they were not familiar with, *'I guess it is a bit like witchcraft you know for those who aren't in the know'* (Elaine). Alternatively, Debra had recently noticed someone sitting opposite her on a train seemed distracted by her movements,

this was knit one purl one knit one purl one there is a lot going on and even though it's very easy there's a lot to look at and I could see he was trying to get on with stuff and he was slightly frowning at me towards the end.

There were some remarks which indicated that knitters sometimes felt people were intrigued by seeing them knitting but didn't want to come and speak to them, putting this down to feeling that it would interrupt them. Laura thought people might be put off by the knitting, saying *'sometimes you get a seat to yourself because people think [you're] a mad woman knitting'*. On the whole, the interviewees spoke positively about the unexpected conversations that knitting in public led to. Like talking with knitters, talking with strangers is also presented as a way to feel connected to other people, however fleeting. For example, Gemma remarked *'I do get comments but then I quite like those cos...it's quite a bonding thing'*.

5.8 What does it mean to be a knitter?

Aside from the ability to knit, I was interested in whether there were personality types or values that they associated with being a knitter. Some said that they did not think there was anything uniting knitters other than their hobby, for example Laura said it would be *'dead boring'* if knitters were all the same. Kay was the only one to answer with a skills based definition, saying *'I want to be*

able to knit at the speed that... [Elaine] does...I won't be able to think that I'm a knitter until...I'm knitting and I'm doing something else'. Elaine was certain that knitters were certain types of people, *'I think knitters are a special class of people'* and likewise Tessa said *'I also think knitters are just generally quite nice people'*. However, it is worth considering how much this might be due to the tendency for knitters who are more sociable people to go to social occasions, attending knitting groups and initiating conversations in knitting shops and therefore knitters may tend to come into contact with other knitters if they are generally more inclined to be social. Elaine said knitters may tend to be patient and that having *'certain qualities...just kind of draws you together'*. Gemma was disappointed when finding out other knitters did not always share her values or interests,

[I]t's funny how sometimes I end up being surprised when we have less in common than I thought we should do because of the fact that we are both knitters so er yes especially when I see people knit really really sort of kitsch tacky stuff and I just think you are not of my tribe (Gemma).

Others considered themselves to be a knitter because their friends and family identified them as such, *'it is something that I am known for'* (Hazel). Penny said *'everybody in my acquaintance thinks I'm a mad knitter'* and Bridie, who had just had her birthday, said *'almost every single card mentioned'* her dressmaking and her knitting.

Interviewees talked about different types of knitter. For example Penny did not identify with people who knitted for charity as she saw herself as a technical knitter instead. There was little interest in yarn bombing, although Chloe acknowledged her opinion depended on its quality, *'it can be hideous I mean it is kind of basically a form of graffiti and it's the same with graffiti it can be beautiful'*. Nancy said she thought it was often difficult to read a political message in yarn bombing because of the lack of text. For a few of the sample there was a clear distinction between their knitting and that of previous generations which they distinguished by using acrylic or scratchy wool and a conservative approach to new techniques.

Debra and Yvonne said that some knitting groups could be cliquey or difficult to integrate into if they were mostly attended by people who had similar approaches to knitting, for example trendy 20-something knitters put one interviewee off, whereas another found retired knitters on small budgets made her feel uncomfortable to knit in expensive luxury yarns. Class was largely not mentioned explicitly by participants. Zoe did remark that knitting was a middle class occupation but that different knitting shops might attract different clientele, e.g. a shop in an affluent area selling silk yarns and a Hobbycraft with basic acrylics.

Moving away from their own opinions on being a knitter I asked the interviewees about general perceptions of knitters. Some thought that knitters were still stereotyped, for example Jane thought non-knitters saw it as *'a really old fashioned older thing to do'* and Nancy saw this as de-valuing knitting and knitters, *'I still think that it's got a bit of a 'this is done by grannies' profile and granny is a short hand term for its conveying a lack of respect'*. Penny did not have patience with people who were not informed about knitting, saying *'they have no idea about the opportunities that knitting has and actually I can't be bothered with that'*. Chloe, however, thought this was changing *'because there has been such a huge explosion of knitting amongst young people which has been in the media a lot and I think it is starting to change people's view of that original stereotype'*.

Some of the interviewees discussed how non-knitters were not aware of the time it can take to make something or assumed you could not knit complicated things. For example Debra said that people rarely commented on a particularly complex cardigan she had made, *'I think it's a really striking cardigan and no one ever says did you knit that and yet I'll wear something like a crocheted neck thing which took me 45 minutes and people will say oh did you knit that'*. Chloe said *'if I show people one of my really complicated lace shawls they won't believe I've made it by hand cos they've never really seen something that's made by hand'*.

Vicky viewed some of the current media interest in knitting with cynicism, saying *'I'm a Guardian reader and the Guardian has, as ever, found something that is cool and has jumped on the band wagon'*. Gemma thought knitting had similarly been hijacked as an easy way for advertisers to represent young people, describing *'mortgage adverts of the young couple while they get their first purchase, that features quite a lot of knitting'*. Beth talked about a similar tactic of advertisers who had made a connotation between women and a liberated femininity, which she viewed with scepticism,

I came across this advertisement just sort of a glossy sort of thing and it was a girl...yarn bombing and so it was this girl standing there in front of her was her bike and her bike was covered in...knitting and it was a tampon commercial.

Beth thought that knitting was used here to say *'I spend my time how I want'*. Gemma was concerned that knitting was now *'hipster'* and said she would prefer it if it went back to being viewed as old fashioned and Nancy said she thought sometimes knitting was part of *'yummy mummy scenarios where you're making things out of love in order to, I don't know, if you use your hands you become a more real person'*. Nancy thought the association with fashion reflected negatively on all knitters by making people think *'this is what people are doing this year rather than this is what people might be genuinely be interested in'*.

5.9 How good a knitter do you think you are?

Although interviewees were never directly asked to assess their competency at knitting, a number of comments led me to build a picture of how they viewed their abilities. There seemed to be respect and admiration rather than competition between knitters. However, there did seem to be some ways knitters differentiated levels of skill and creativity and placed themselves in

relation to others. This was almost entirely in relation to designing patterns versus working from patterns done by other people. For example Rosie said

I think it's something about knitting it's something that you don't need to have a talent for unless you want to actually create something and be a designer. I'm not a very creative person in the sense of being able to just come up with stuff.

Chloe, who designs patterns remarked, *'you can be someone who's a good knitter but you're not very creative or you can't come up with the ideas, it takes quite a lot of skills to do it well and a lot of practice'* and *'I think it's a natural progression that most knitters when they do get to a certain level they do start inventing their own stuff'*. These statements imply both that creative ability does distinguish some knitters from others, and that it is 'natural' for knitters to reach a point where they want to progress to designing. Penny placed a particular emphasis on the technical elements of knitting and said this was a way you could *'improve yourself'*. Largely the creative ability required to design patterns was presented as unachievable for many. However, Ivy, always designed her own garments and did not present it as in any way remarkable or unusual. This may be because she used a particular method of designing, Elizabeth Zimmerman's, which demystifies what might otherwise seem intimidating.

When choosing a pattern to use most of the knitters I asked said they would not look at the stitches involved, instead assuming they would be able to work out how to do them, indicating a degree of confidence. For example, Kay was unphased by the 'work' of knitting, saying *'I don't think of knitting as work even though I know there's millions of stitches that I've never done I just think well I'll just learn how to do that stitch'*. Despite often not feeling confident about designing their own patterns, most of the knitters said they made at least small modifications to other people's patterns, sometimes planning beforehand, sometimes making changes as the project progressed. For example, Nancy said *'I've never managed to make a jumper without customising it which slows*

everything down I'm like this would look so much better if it fitted better here' and Olive talked about her tentative experimentation,

I'm getting less precious I think it's a confidence thing as well, I'm very much read the pattern line by line, word by word, I've got to do it to the pattern and if I don't do it to the pattern what if that effects it later on it is getting to know when something will have an effect and if you can just fudge it.

For Bridie it was modifications which held her attention, *'I also enjoy changing things to make them interesting starting with a pattern and changing things so it's very slightly different'*.

Discussion as to why the interviewee thought they were suited to knitting involved consideration of how knitting fitted in with Kay's lifestyle, and Laura could not put her finger on the specific skills required, saying *'I just have the facility for it'*. Rosie said her engineering background helped as she was confident reading and following charted patterns. Sophie similarly said *'there are some really complex patterns that...the mathematician in me really appreciates'* and Wendy had noticed she found it easier to adjust stitch counts in relation to her gauge than others at her knitting group, putting this down to a background in mathematical engineering.

Despite putting an emphasis on learning new things there was little indication that participants assessed their success or otherwise by 'collecting' techniques. There was some discussion about being competitive with oneself and being inspired by other people, but no discussion of a competitive comparison to others. When knitters did talk about their competency they sometimes downplayed it. For example Debra said *'I'm not technically perfect but I can actually do stuff so I think it's very accessible and I think the thing that goes against that is that it looks complicated but is actually straightforward'*. Expressing some confidence, Olive, who preferred knitting simpler patterns, said that *'there's things that I'll imagine I'll never be able to do I probably know my limitations but I probably wouldn't necessarily not try something'*. Vicky was

similarly cautious about expressing her skills, *'I don't have great confidence in my [ability] I know what colours I like, whether they suit me or not I don't know or whether they'll suit the person I'm giving it to I don't know'*. However, in my reflective notes after the interview I wrote *'mentions doesn't feel creative or have confidence in colours yet she specifically mentions what type of colours things are more than other people and not just blue but teal or cerise – detailed descriptions making me think colour is important to her'*. This demonstrates the relative and personal nature of people's self-assessment, Vicky might have been more conscious of her colour judgement simply because she was more aware of colours than others.

Summary

This chapter has outlined key findings from the interviews conducted as part of Stage 3 of the research. Findings have been organised into descriptive categories which grouped together initial codes which were deemed to have similar types of content. These categories have been labelled using questions to imply an interrogation of the data and to focus on the content of the participant's phrases rather than interpreting them. This descriptive coding of the findings found that knitting is important to the women I spoke to as they devote time, money, and emotional investment to it. Knitting is embedded into their everyday lives, relationships and, it will be argued in the coming chapters, their identities. The findings reported here and in Chapter 4 (which contains the initial analysis of Stages 1 and 2) were further analysed and organised into conceptual themes characterised as creativity, productivity and social interaction and discussed over the course of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 6 Finding flow and '*my creativity*':

Theme 1

Introduction

This chapter looks at findings which relate to knitting as a creative process. It was observed that the interviewees referred to two different types of creativity, one placing an emphasis on originality and the other on process and functionality. This chapter seeks to define these different types of creativity and explore some of the different facets such as problem identification and trial and error. The chapter explores why participants frequently seem to place an emphasis on a balance between challenging and achievable goals. The second section of the chapter questions why knitters might seem to experience a sense of control, autonomy and independence through their knitters. It will consider how the knitters might place different criteria on their knitting. Furthermore, the section will discuss how knitters might do so as much for the benefits of the process of knitting than the final outcomes. This chapter explores these benefits in relation to creativity and particularly uses Csikszentmihalyi (2002 [1992]) to help interpret what interviewees told me. The discussion in this chapter analyses findings which include:

- Interviewees presented knitting as something they needed to do. They contrasted the opportunity to be creative with other areas of their lives. Most knitters knitted every day and furthermore it was integrated into their daily lives, fitting around work and life responsibilities.
- Knitters valued the opportunity to make something unique or adapt something to their own requirements. The control they had over decision making was contrasted with other areas of their lives.

- Interviewees enjoyed the physical process of knitting and again contrasted tangible evidence of labour with other activities they engaged in

6.2 Defining creativity

This section looks at the two different definitions of the term creativity that the knitters used when talking about knitting:

‘Creativity’ definition 1 – emphasis on the novelty of the final product.

‘Creativity’ definition 2 – focus on the functionality of the outcome, including fit, shape, texture, aesthetics, or requirements that the process of producing the object be fun, relaxing, engaging, or easy.

These two forms of creativity are defined before focusing on the latter as this is the most frequently used definition when the knitters are talking about their knitting. This type of creativity is understood as involving a balance between two motivations. Firstly, there is an intrinsic motivation to enjoy the process of knitting for its own sake. Secondly, there are requirements in terms of the functionality or appearance of the end product the knitters work to achieve. Existing literature has considered how knitting can be relaxing (such as Corkhill, 2014), in this chapter I will additionally explore how knitting as a form of creativity is also often challenging as knitters impose specific requirements on the end product and the material and techniques impose their own practical constraints. After these ideas are introduced they are further developed using Csikszentmihalyi’s (2002 [1992]) notion of ‘flow’.

Although there was a prevailing consensus amongst interviewees regarding the two different conceptions of creativity there was some variation in how the terminology was used. Some used ‘creativity’ to describe both the work of pattern designers and their own knitting. For example Rosie used the same term to refer to two different types of creativity, *‘I’m not a very creative person*

in the sense of being able to just come up with stuff so I feel that my creative part is turning whatever someone thought of into something, that's my creativity'. Jane had a similar perspective and felt that the second definition of creativity was 'hers',

This is my creative thing, this is my making... and I'm doing something with my hands sort of thing... I can't draw or paint so it's kind of like this is my creative thing (Jane).

Elaine and Eva both applied the term 'artistic' to knitting even when the knitter was following a pattern, *'everybody is not a designer but if you follow a pattern it doesn't matter cos you're still picking the colour you want you're customising it to how you want and I think it can be a great outlet for creativity and just being artistic'* (Elaine).

A second group did not apply creativity to their own knitting but talked about very similar processes to definition 2 such as problem solving as the previous group and so could be considered as fitting in with the second definition of creativity that the previous group used. For example Olive did not to use creativity to describe her own knitting and used it to describe activities where the design was unique to the maker,

I have some serious envy of the creativity that people have because I don't have that creativity I love being artistic but I need a pattern or I need something to follow (Olive).

Vicky also contrasted artistic and original creativity with her knitting,

I'm not a particularly creative person you know I couldn't paint a picture or do a pattern out of my head with knitting you have a pattern it tells you this size of yarn this number of stitches and it gives you guidance all the way through I very rarely stray from patterns unless I'm feeling really adventurous and think well it doesn't really matter I can always take it back.

Lastly, Chloe, the only professional pattern designer in the sample, was unusual out of those interviewed in making a clear distinction between those people who were and were not creative, *'you can be someone who's a good knitter but you're not very creative or you can't come up with the ideas'* meaning she did not use the term 'creative' to describe definition 2.

Despite this variation in terminology there was a broad understanding that there was two different types of practice involved in knitting and designing which, for the purposes of this research I have termed 'creativity' definition 1 and 2. Interviewees particularly implied creativity involved artistic ability, originality, functionality and self-expression. These reflect some of the core concepts Runco (2014) identifies in his cross-disciplinary review of academic literature on creativity. This chapter explores some of the concepts associated with definition 2. Whether or not the knitters use the term 'creative' they tend to talk about similar things, including enjoying the process of knitting as an intrinsic motivation, problem identification and solving, and functionality.

This creativity could be described as 'a sort of 'personal effectiveness' in coping well and making choices... A creativity of everyday life' (Craft, 2002:43). Runco (2014:425) suggests everyday creativity is important given its accessibility and, although not likely to make significant changes to our lives (as the product of novel creativity might), therefore merits study,

[i]ts practicality lies in the fact that for many people it is the area in which they are the most likely to be creative. They may dress creatively, cook creatively, teach or parent creatively, and although these actions do not fit neatly into the typical domain theory, they can be original and useful—they can be creative.'

Gemma also presents this form of creativity as part of everyday life including knitting alongside other creative activities, including *'potting [making ceramics]... the allotment, I write a diary...we do yoga together in the morning that feels creative even though we're just following a tape'*. Knitters expressed joy at the possibilities knitting offered them – planning, being spontaneous,

changing plans, making mistakes – all of which could be associated with an everyday creativity.

One aspect of creativity is intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [1988]; Runco, 2014), meaning that the process of knitting is experienced and enjoyed for its own sake. This can be seen in many of the interviews, for example '*I do enjoy wearing it as well but it's almost a by-product*' (Gail). At the extreme, Beth did not even like knitted garments and Sarah, a member of the knitting group I observed in the pilot study, felt sad when she finished a project. Debra said she did not wear scarves before she started knitting, implying that learning to knit led to a demand for the final objects rather than that she learnt to knit in order to have scarves to wear. Penny gives most of her knitting away and commented that she experienced the same enjoyment from knitting for others as she did from making something for herself. Although the focus in the data is on the experience of knitting as an intrinsic motivation, there is a continuum on which people fall. Most also attribute some degree of motivation to extrinsic rewards as well, such as the knitted product or admiration from other people. Nancy said she enjoyed the process of knitting but this could be overwhelmed by feelings of resentment if the outcome was for someone else and demanded too much of her time, '*the thing about not making really big items for people I know that ... the resentment of knitting it would outweigh the pleasure I get from knitting it*'. Elaine referred to herself as a '*product knitter*', but said '*I do I enjoy doing it obviously cos I wouldn't put in all these hours but I very much like having something tangible at the end that you know I can wear or give to somebody or yeah I like the product*'.

Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1975]), a prominent researcher within creativity scholarship and discussed more below, similarly includes experimentation and play in his understanding of the creative process, '*it's like going through the wardrobe in Narnia into a fantasy land*' (Penny). Interviewees also knitted to make something useful and functional, in line with Runco's (2014) suggestion that creativity, along with intrinsic motivation, is also aimed at fulfilling a function. The outcome of creativity is judged a success determined by the

extent that it fulfils this function, whether this is to express emotion in an artwork or make best use of a hand-dyed skein of yarn in a jumper (Runco, 2014). Knitting is therefore a balance between intrinsic and goal orientated motivation. In order to achieve the desired outcome the knitters spoke about a process of problem identification and solving. They talked about which colours went together or would suit them, re-working sections repeatedly to work out how to create a satisfactory shape or pattern, hunting for the 'right' yarn type, or seeking new techniques to create a stretchy cast-off or properly shaped sock.

One of the methods of problem identification and solving discussed by many of the knitters was of trial and error. This is reflected in Runco's (2014:23) description of creativity as involving moving towards a solution, '[t]rial and error is step-by-step problem solving, where errors are made but corrected, each representing a small step forward, toward the solution'. For example Cathy described her usual practice of taking more than one attempt to start a new pattern,

I normally start things about 3 or 4 times before I'm like ok I can go with this, this is ok and I find maybe the first line or 2 I do normally don't look that great it's when you get a bit further in that it looks ok but I get to that 3rd or 4th row and I'm like no it's not good enough I have to start again.

Others enjoyed that they could experiment and not be afraid to make mistakes in the knowledge that their knitting was not permanent and could be easily unravelled for another attempt.

Knitters experiment and make errors as they work towards solving a problem determined by the aesthetic and practical requirements of the end product including those dictated by the basic properties of knitting, for example loops of yarn have to be secured to previous loops or the knitting will unravel, and garments must fit the complex three-dimensional shapes of the human body. Different requirements require different stitches, for example cuffs must be

stretchy and tightly fitting. Other requirements are personal, for example Amy wanted her knitting to follow specific self-defined aesthetic requirements. She discussed a process of trial and error as she repeated a sleeve on a jumper for her husband until the colours in her self-striping yarn aligned how she wanted,

the colours change of the wool and since himself wanted a V-neck which isn't entirely Shetland style traditional I had to basically pull my yarn apart to do the front bits and the back and then I decided I had to do the sleeves so the sleeves match and basically if I do it in the round you get very long rounds, the sleeves are less than half of what the body is so I'm pulling the yarn apart again but I am a perfectionist I am allowed to be a perfectionist when knitting is concerned... you go no, no, no, this is not going to happen so I just unpicked a sleeves because of the colour transitions, they weren't what I liked, it comes with the territory every knitter has done it.

Amy was using yarn which changed colour at regular intervals. Given that the circumference of the arm is less than of the body she found the bands of colour the self-striping yarn created were wider in the arms than the body of the jumper. She established this problem through knitting the jumper for the first time and, through repeated phases of planning and re-knitting, she worked out a way to ensure the bands of colour ran across the whole jumper. This example, and other comments in the data, suggest that knitters exhibit some of the personal traits that Runco (2014) identifies as important in creative people such as a tolerance of ambiguity (sometimes knitters just had to try things out before working out the correct technique or shaping), a tolerance of risk (most knitters talked about having to rip back large sections of knitting, as Amy does), and flexibility (this was welcomed by the knitters who enjoyed a vast variety of techniques and styles to knit).

When talking about why they enjoyed knitting most of the interviewees highlighted the importance of intellectual engagement, for example Penny described knitting as '*accessible and...challenging*'. This echoes Runco's

(2014) suggestion that creative people tend to have a preference for complexity. Other knitters also suggested knitting involved a balance between demand and achievability. The knitters felt a sense of achievement and a pleasure in working through difficult bits, although some found mistakes and too much of a challenge off putting. The challenge of fulfilling requirements, whether practical or defined by self-imposed criteria (as Amy does above) combined with periods where the knitter enjoys the process for its own sake can be understood using Csikszentmihalyi's (2002 [1992]) notion of 'flow'. The knitters described parts of the process that were more or less enjoyable, most of the knitters included a period of knitting where a rhythm had been established, they had understood the combination of stitches that were required but they had not become so familiar that boredom had set in.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002 [1992]) uses flow to describe an experience that happens when an individual is performing at their best with closely focused attention. He has developed this theory over the course of his career, looking at activities that range from rock climbing to surgery, leisure activities to paid work (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Although originally publishing about flow at least forty years ago Csikszentmihalyi remains a widely cited author and a selection of his research has been re-published in a new collection in the last year (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). One of Csikszentmihalyi's key requisites for a person to experience flow during an activity is that the perceived challenge matches how they see their own ability. Too difficult and they will feel frustration, too easy and they will feel bored. Additionally, the person must be focused completely on the activity, and their attention must be given voluntarily. Rosie stressed the value she placed in focusing her attention on her physical movements and the voluntary qualities of the activity, saying

it's sort of like my creative side ... this is probably the only thing that I do with my hands that's not cooking and ... cooking you have to do it sometimes it's not always something you choose to do.

Other knitters also describe giving knitting their full attention, such as Debra who said she sometimes stayed up late to finish a sleeve.

The investment of the limited resource of attention and energy in creativity that Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1978]) discusses is a circular process. Runco (2014:300) suggests 'the creative person also values creativity and intentionally invests time and effort in creativity'. Knitters are potentially more likely to see the value of spending significant time knitting, even when it is not easy, because they already know the value of the experience. In addition to requiring an investment of attention, creativity serves to consume the attention of the knitter. The knitters described periods of knitting that were relaxing and emptied their brain whilst at the same time where all consuming. This knitting was mindless and repetitive yet allowed them to lose awareness of day-to-day worries and demands on their time. Gemma said *'it's a relaxing sort of thing because you can't rush and there's nothing else you can be doing with your hands and there's nothing else you're meant to be doing so you can just get on and, like, knit'*. Some seemed unable to relinquish this feeling, describing themselves as a *'true addict'* (Kay) and *'obsessive'* (Tessa), and the process of knitting as *'an addiction for yourself you know you can't stop'* (Eva) and that *'if I haven't knitted for a few days I do start to feel slight withdrawal'* (Debra). Tessa summarises how knitting can involve the all-encompassing focusing of attention and desire for a challenge that Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1978]) suggests is key to flow experiences,

sort of simple projects the soothing kind of knitting helped my anxiety but actually the more complex was particularly good for my anxiety because I have obsessive compulsive thought patterns and I discovered if...something was really difficult I just can't think about anything else it's like a rest for the brain.

Knitting, therefore, involves a series of balances, such as between intrinsic motivation and working towards the requirements of a functional outcome. Knitters also balance the challenge presented and their perceived skill. The ratio of challenge and skill determines whether the knitter experiences flow, relaxation or boredom. Knitting involves play and problem solving, expression

and determination, freedom and restraints. Creativity requires close attention, but knitting can become muscle memory. Knitters use easier knitting to relax, congruent with Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) suggestion that when the level of challenge falls slightly below skill level relaxation is experienced, rather than the boredom that can stem from a too great a discrepancy between challenge and skill.

If creativity involves limitations and requirements then creative individuals need to be able to judge their success or otherwise (Runco, 2014). Theorists of creativity often describe a verification stage, where external gatekeepers determine whether something is creative or not and its success, such as gallery owners or film critics (Runco, 2014). However, focusing on an everyday creativity, knitters employ skills to ensure their creativity results in their own desired function rather than aiming at external verification, although they do enjoy making things that other people admire and can use, and knitting can be indirectly social as they consider these external requirements. Knitting is discussed above as a process involving learning, play, and experimentation, and which therefore requires ways of knowing what is successful and what is not. Jenkins' (2004) ways of knowing are used here to understand some of the ways knitters do this. Knitters such as Amy described different ways of working, involving varying degrees of intuition and foresight,

I just keep going start at the top or the bottom wherever and work it out as I go along...I know people who that probably would drive round the bend but I kind of like that freedom rather than doing the maths beforehand.

Although, as Amy suggests, there were different types of working amongst the knitters, there were some unifying types of knowledge that were described across the interviews, as discussed in the next paragraph.

Jenkins (2004) argues that creativity is one part of identification, the process of continually forming and reforming our identity through social interactions (see Section 2.2). He discusses different ways of knowing oneself and our

environment. Jenkins (2004:45) discusses a sense of embodiment in a physical world (see discussion of control and grounding in Section 6.4), emotions, memory of senses, creativity and imagination, tacit embodied knowledge, and learnt 'retrievable' knowledge. It is notable that these involve both a personal interaction with one's physical and social environment, in the case of knitting. Chapter 8 will further discuss the artificial distinction between individual and collective identity. The knitters discussed times when they used these different ways of knowing within the knitting process and Jenkins' framework is used here to organise them.

Knitting can be understood as using sensory knowledge (Jenkins, 2004) as it requires the knitter to make decisions regarding different yarn types and colours, and 'feel' the stitches. Participants described the difficulty of explaining stitches to others using words and the benefits of demonstrating stitches that were felt in muscle memory as sequences of movements rather than known and conceptualised as individual steps. Olive described using touch to choose the right yarn,

it's a bit of a tactile thing it's not like you know looking at a shirt that's made of cotton that's fairly standard you know what you're getting it's like buying a perfume unless you really know what you're getting how it smells on you you're unlikely to buy that without going in and testing it on yourself does it smell nice on you then I want it and how does it feel is it fluffy is it scratchy does it shed they're all factors in the yarn especially if it's for a specific project.

During Stage 1 I noted how, in the instructional book, identity was portrayed as existing in the mind and the body. The author implied knitting could be a way to connect ourselves to our bodies, for example the experience of being in a yarn shop is described using sensual language as

enticing and intensely personal...There was something alluring about the needles... I found myself simultaneously intrigued and

confused...touching and pawing a fraction of the various yarns...I was hit with the reality that it was tactile stimulation I had been missing. So often we are told not to touch...it almost felt sinful to get my hands on so many different items that weren't made of metal or plastic (Greer, 2008:11).

The author draws the reader in by describing the yarn shop as full of things waiting to be touched. That we may still tend towards privileging conceptual knowledge over physical experience is reflected in the author's comment that she felt 'almost sinful' to enjoy the sensation of the yarns. Knitting, as a tactile experience geared towards a functional end product may be a justifiable way to enjoy sensual knowledge.

Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1978]) focuses on how creativity involves conceptual attention. Knitting additionally demonstrates how attention can involve the body as well as the mind. The yarn passes through the knitter's fingers and, whilst not directly involving the whole body, the effects of knitting for several hours extend from the hands to the shoulders and neck. Knitting can leave its physical mark on lifelong knitters, for example a member of the pilot study knitting group who had knitted since she was a child had a stooped posture and arthritic fingers. Chloe had taught a friend to knit and both were surprised when her friend learnt it very quickly. They surmised that she must have learnt at school and that her muscles remembered the required movements longer than the memory had lasted in her mind. Yarn tension and stitches may be judged and learnt through touch and sight until they become tacit. Knitting is often worn and therefore must fulfil requirements to feel comfortable, to not itch, to be tight in some places and allow for movement in others. If the knitting is a gift the knitter must imagine the responses of the receiver and anticipate their embodied experience of the object. Knitted garments as gifts create a sensory link between people, as discussed by Turney (2012). That knitting might heighten our awareness of our bodies and physical potential is discussed more below in relation to grounding and control.

Knitting involves tacit knowledge, another of Jenkins' (2004) ways of knowing, involving information which is not actively and explicitly learnt and remembered but instead is passed on by other means such as through mimicry. Some of the conversations I have had with knitters relate to how different people hold the needles, something which can be passed between knitters using mimicry and so, as Jane said, members of a knitting group can sometimes attribute their style to whoever they learnt from. Through tacit communication members of the knitting community pass on conventions in addition to best practice, something discussed more in the next chapter. There is also learnt knowledge in knitting, explicitly taught things through classes, groups, books and the internet. Knitting also involves emotional knowledge, as Jenkins' (2004) includes in his types of knowledge, as knitters spoke about guilt, satisfaction and memories in the process of telling me about different projects. Knitters use sensory, bodily, tacit, emotional and learnt knowledge to judge practical and conventional limitations on their knitting. Through applying these different ways of knowing they involve their bodies and minds in the experience of knitting and devote considerable attention to it. This section sets out the key ideas which are developed through the next part and the rest of the chapter regarding creativity, self-expression, challenge and identity forming and performing.

6.3 Control and autonomy

This section examines what benefits being creative brought the knitters, specifically focusing on what they said about how they felt in control of their time, bodies and personal space. This section suggests that when women speak of the creativity, problem-solving, embodied and conceptual process of knitting and the emotional and sensory experience of gifting or wearing their knitted objects, they are engaging in a process of identification, creating and articulating who they are. As has been discussed in Chapter 2, Jenkins (2014) suggests that, rather than having a true inner identity which we can choose to express, we create an ongoing sense of who we are through interacting with

those around us. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) supports this perspective by suggesting that creativity is part of the way we form identity by facilitating some of these interactions. In particular this section focuses on the notions of control and autonomy that Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1978]:8) describes as being consequences of creativity,

I know that I am alive, that I am somebody, that I matter, when I choose to interact with a system of stimuli that I can modify and from which I get meaningful feedback, whether the system is made up of other people, musical notes, ideas, or tools. The ability to focus attention is the most basic way of reducing ontological anxiety, the fear of impotence, of nonexistence.

In turn knitting will be discussed as a way to produce unique items which set the maker apart from other people, as a welcome opportunity to experience full control and autonomy in their decision making, physical movements and, personal space, and as demanding their full attention and therefore diminishing the extent other thoughts interrupted their focus.

Knitters might experience a sense of control and individuality because of being able to make something unique that they can modify to suit their needs, for example Nancy makes hats big enough to fit over her hair when it is worn in a bun hairstyle. Debra commented that it was not necessarily that she produced something that drastically set her apart from others, just that she made something that was her own, *'it's not like dressing in a particularly innovate or whacky way but it's just nice to have some little things that are different'*. Before Penny retired she held a senior position in the medical profession which it might be assumed came with the ability to make independent decisions. However, she suggested that because she was deciding on her own requirements and projects whilst knitting she had *'tremendous autonomy to make decisions'* which she compared to her professional life where she felt she had little opportunity to dictate her time and tasks.

Penny's description of autonomy stems from a personal interaction with knitting but she also spoke about enjoying making something unique and challenging for her sister. The process of making something unique requires some kind of 'meaningful feedback' whether from other people, such as Penny's sister, or from the knitter themselves, for example in Nancy's case she could comfortably wear the hat she had tailored to her needs (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [1978]: 8). Knitting does not require someone to carry obvious equipment, such as a yoga bag, or leave distinguishing changes on the body that are apparent to passers-by in the street such as the posture of a dancer. However, knitting does have a physical outcome, a marker or badge of pride which sets the knitter apart from non-knitters. Knitters can wear and gift the evidence of their skill and productivity. By making something and receiving feedback from others around them and the materials of their making the women can shape their sense of self as individuals and establish the value of their skills. This feedback from others means knitting alone can sometimes be indirectly social as the knitter considers the possible reception their knitting could achieve.

Csikszentmihalyi's (2014 [1978]:8) quote above, regarding 'reducing ontological anxiety' also suggests that the control experienced through creativity can extend further than simply the experience of making something unique into a wider sense of purpose and identity. Control was mentioned by several participants, for example, Laura talked about the importance of creating the whole of something herself, *'seeing the fabric grow you're not working on a blank canvas you're knitting it'*. Zoe said *'maybe it's a control thing I wonder cos I do like the feel of the wool and measuring it through my hand and knowing that the way I hold that wool directly effects how my piece of knitting will look'*. By using sensory and tacit bodily knowledge Zoe feels in control over her body and can see the evidence of this knowledge in the knitting she produced. Some of the interviewees reported enjoying the physical feeling of knitting, commenting on getting into a rhythm and the satisfaction of reaching a level of physical dexterity. Zoe extended the physical feeling of knitting to control over her personal space saying *'I don't know what*

the word is its more it's in its own setting and an extension of your own space and extension of the body creating this nice fabric'. Similarly, Munro and Madigan (1999) suggest that within the home women use their domestic tasks to create their own space and distance themselves from what was going on around them, whether this a conversation they are not part of or a television programme they do not want to watch. Gemma mentioned as a lecturer she sometimes had to attend talks that did not interest her and that knitting prevented her from getting frustrated. This echoes the notion that knitting might provide a 'bubble' or refuge, insulating the knitter from what Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1988]: 166) calls 'psychic entropy'.

Similarly, when Amy was experiencing problems in her personal life that were outside of her control she presented knitting as a refuge, *'this is what keeps you sane keep doing it because it was a situation where I really had no control to change it at that point...you're in control of the process from start to finish'*. She countered the feelings of being unable to control her personal situation by knitting, a process where she could control every detail. Gail, having recently become a mother for the first time, explicitly compared the level of control inside and outside her knitting, saying

if I'm waiting for something or in the very early stages of labour or while I was waiting before I was induced you know stressful times and I was sitting there knitting and it kept me calm so it's a part of who I am and it's also how I manage the fact that I'm an anxious control freak ... because I have control over that [indicating her knitting] that [demonstrating with her hands to indicate the rest of her life] doesn't matter I have control over the small things the big things don't matter.

As has been discussed above, knitting involves balances between different ideas. Knitting involves both fun and experimentation combined with practical and aesthetic restraints and requirements, discussed in the previous section.

It also involves both control (precise movements and a strict sequence of stitches) and a simultaneous feeling 'letting go' and relaxing attention. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) describes how our default setting is to flick our attention between different tasks, people and responsibilities, both those going on around us and internally going through our thoughts. Contrastingly, flow experiences give us a sense of 'letting go' because they demand enough of our attention to banish other thoughts and awareness, a 'merging of action and awareness, a sense of control, and an altered state of time' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [2005]: 230). In the quotes above from Gail, Zoe and Amy they contrast how they felt whilst knitting with the lack of control or worries they experienced during other times. Interpreted using the concept of flow it can be suggested that through their creativity and devotion of attention they lose their self-awareness and anxiety over losing control and so, conversely, feel more in control (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [2005]). Literature has hinted at the relationship between knitting and physical and mental control, for example Chansky (2010:695) refers to knitting as the 'new yoga', perhaps intending this comment to indicate that knitting has replaced yoga as a lifestyle trend, but also suggesting a physical and mental cleansing and discipline. As with yoga, knitting involves a regime and ideology, to avoid idleness and gain control over mind and body. Notions of avoiding idleness are discussed further in Chapter 7.

Research participants contrasted their experience of knitting as a creative activity compared with other parts of their lives. A questionnaire respondent commented '*I love the idea of 'making' in a world that forces us more and more to a passive life and role*' (Q9). Other knitters contrasted the experience of knitting with technology, for example Vicky said '*I also think I went back to knitting because I used to be a librarian and I then became a website editor I think it's a reaction against technology*'. This echoes Myzelev's (2009) suggestion that contemporary knitting can be subversive even if done without this intent as through the activity the knitter disrupts the pace of everyday life as a slow method of production contrasting with the fast pace of many of our working lives. Additionally, the types of knowledge involved in knitting such as

embodied, sensory and emotional may not be associated with many of our interactions with objects which play a more transitory role in our lives.

The interviewees often said that knitting as a form of everyday creativity (using the second definition of creativity from the Section 6.3) was accessible to them compared to, as they saw it, creativity such as pattern designing or artistic forms of creativity which they thought they would not be able to do (definition 1). Knitting, as a craft, could be viewed as receiving less aesthetic and intellectual critique than other creative pursuits such as fine art painting. Several knitters said that knitting was a way for them to be creative without requiring artistic ability, as they saw it, because there was patterns devised by someone else that they could follow. The requirements placed upon knitting as a creative process, such as making sure it does not unravel and that it fits, could be seen to limit the accessibility of the activity. However, this structure might conversely make knitting more accessible, especially to beginners or people who have low levels of confidence in their creative or artistic ability, by providing a structure to the activity. Additionally, Johnson and Wilson (2005) suggest women may tend to choose activities without strict structures of external judgement in order to express themselves without fear of not being 'good enough'. This links with the attitude expressed by Debra who said that, *'my knitting isn't perfect ... I'm not technically perfect but I can actually do stuff so I think it's very accessible'*.

Knitting might be an ideal way to experience flow because of its accessibility in terms of limited equipment and the straightforward options for progression without large jumps between levels of challenge. Even very complex lace patterns are basically different combinations of a small number of stitches so the knitter can slowly progress through more complex patterns without too much difficulty. Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [2005]) says that we are more likely to feel intrinsic motivation to do something, and therefore experience flow, when we feel efficient and competent at the activity. From the beginning of learning to knit it is possible to quickly produce a serviceable knitted fabric, unlike, for example, playing the violin which might require more practising before the

player produces something coherent. Knitting is an ideal way to experience flow because people can quickly feel competent and easily progress ensuring skill and challenge levels can always be matched. For example, Yvonne commented

you find some people who can't knit sometimes they'll be 'oh it's so clever that you knit' and it's not, there's a pattern I just do what the pattern says, literally there is no creativity in it I mean I have chosen the yarn and made it and I'm exaggerating but they tell you exactly knit 3 together and then it will slant this way.

Although knitting was portrayed as accessible there is some evidence that the knitters are simultaneously subjecting their knitting to aesthetic critique and therefore are creating a value scheme against which they could assess their creativity. As discussed previously, Vicky said that she thought she did not have the ability to judge whether colours went together or suited her, however elsewhere in the interview it was notable that she did describe colours in detail, making me think colour was something she had some competency in and that she thought was important. Penny also applied some aesthetic- or value-based judgement commenting that some knitters who did not challenge themselves were not the kind of knitters she identified with. She seemed to distance herself from what she saw as easy knitting such as knitting squares. This notion of cultural value and creativity will be developed more in the next chapter, however it is relevant to note here that Penny also had experience of weaving, arguably a more established 'professional' studio based textile craft. This may have informed her opinion that knitting, even if the outcome is objects to be used rather than as artworks, could be considered more than simply an ideal way for the knitters to be creative because it is accessible in terms of being without critique. Penny did judge knitting subject to aesthetic and value-based judgements regarding skill which could be compared to those use in conjunction with other cultural products. Additionally, as has been discussed throughout this section the type of creativity exhibited by the knitters was one

based on requirements, functionality, and limitations in addition to self-expression and freedom from gatekeepers. The sample expressed some similar attitudes, discussed above, to the type of creativity they wanted to undertake in their leisure time. We could speculate as to the links between the similar socioeconomic characteristics of the sample and some of their views on creativity. As discussed in Section 3.4.2, there were some features of the sample that might be seen as unifying such as affluence and education. The importance that a number of the sample seemed to place on a type of creativity that involved goals and requirements may have a relationship with their attitudes towards ambition and challenge in the rest of their lives. It has not been explored in this research, but these may be women who assign value to tasks which present them with an opportunity to learn new skills and that are not achieved easily in activities outside of knitting in addition to their knitted projects. This points to the potential of studying leisure activities and creativity as a way to shed light on some of our broader motivations and attitudes towards labour, work and value. Studies in this area may also contribute to our understanding of the gendered nature of these concepts. The importance placed on knitting as a certain type of creativity may be part of the women's, perhaps unconscious, attitudes towards how their time is valued by themselves and others, and the ambitions they have.

One theorist that may help understand some of the relationship between socioeconomic status, creativity and leisure activity is Florida (2002) who suggested that a new social class was emerging around the time of the millennium. He called this a 'creative class' made up of professionals. Florida (2012) has recently revised this publication to emphasise the way that these creative individuals bring prosperity with them to the cities and areas they live and work. This class is, according to Florida (2012), characterised by ambitious individuals who work flexibly in creative and stable jobs. This includes those working in sectors such as education, which a number of this sample are drawn from. In addition to investing considerable time in their workplaces Florida asserts that the creative class also demand leisure time which is nearby to where they live and work and which takes place in many

small places with mixed communities, similar to many of the experiences interviewees described of attending local knitting groups and frequenting local stores. He terms this 'street level culture' that takes place in cafes and restaurants and where there is not a clear distinction between producer and consumer of culture (Florida, 2012:19). We could speculate that knitting, as a way of providing a type of creativity which is aspirational, about problem solving and achievement and that induces a feeling of control and autonomy through flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002 [1992]) can be connected with the new types of professionals who value similar things in the leisure time and careers that Florida (2012) describes. Florida (2012) suggests these people are in well paid and stable jobs and generate income for the cities in which they live. Furthermore, they attract new populations which add to the cultural diversity in the area. In this climate we may see numbers of aspirational individuals with some spare time and disposable income who seek opportunities to feel a similar sense of achievement and autonomy in their leisure time as they do in their careers, an observation which bears further study.

Summary

This chapter has discussed findings relating to the types and benefits of creativity that can be involved in knitting. The chapter describes two different ways the knitters used the term 'creativity'. The first application was used by the knitters to describe the actions of designers and those creating their own patterns with a focus on originality. The second application was used more frequently in the interviews and seemed to be defined as involving a balance between expression and limitations, intrinsic motivation and the requirements of a functioning end product.

The knitters valued the opportunity to be creative and that they can adjust the balance between their ability and the challenge the project presents depending on whether they want intellectual engagement or relaxation. Creativity is

achieved through different ways of knowing which are conceptual and embodied and based on interactions, with other people and with the physical accoutrements of the activity. The flexibility that knitting offers means it is well suited for the women to experience flow because it requires little equipment, the basic steps are accessible – meaning there is less time before skill level matches the challenge of entry-level projects, and it seems it is unthreatening for those who do not consider themselves to be the type of person who can design original things or be artistically creative.

The knitters I interviewed described two benefits of engaging in knitting as a creative activity:

1. Creativity offers the knitters the opportunity to express things and to feel satisfaction at meeting technical, cultural and personal requirements in producing a functioning item.
2. A creative activity offers the knitters an opportunity to experience ‘flow’, loss of self-awareness, relaxation and autonomy (Csikszentmihalyi, [1992], 2002). They also feel in control of their bodies, minds and personal space.

In this respect knitting as part of the formation and communication of identity happens both in private, as the knitter sets her own requirements, experiences flow, and recognises her own achievement. However, it can also be argued that even knitting alone involves a consideration of other people and the ideas surrounding the value of skill, and notions of what is or is not worthy of the term ‘creativity’, and can therefore be indirectly social. Considering the ways in which knitting is creative has shed light on the continuous process of knitting which is not limited to individual projects but instead extends over many years of overlapping knitting projects. For example, even those knitters who said they did sometimes have pauses in their knitting said there was always something on the needles in case they wished to knit. The next chapter considers further how knitting provides short term continuity within individual projects and medium term continuity over the course of the knitter’s lifetime.

Chapter 7 Producing identity and producing objects, *‘there’s a point where you just have to keep going’*: Theme 2

Introduction

This chapter discusses the second key theme that was identified in the data, characterised as ‘productivity’ and referring to the generation of memories and identity, and using time in a productive manner. Findings suggest that knitting requires determination, is sometimes boring, and often involves hard work, things which may seem surprising in an activity people choose to do in their leisure time. This chapter questions why the women choose to engage in this activity in their spare time rather than activities which may require less effort. Participants said that knitting meets their need to do something where they can see tangible evidence of their time and effort.

The chapter begins by positing that this form of ‘work’ might be a way to generate memories, roles and identities in addition to physical knitted outcomes. The chapter will consider why the interviewees seemed to link knitting with memories and stories and how these might relate to their sense of self. Furthermore, the discussion then ponders how knitting could trigger changes in an individual’s identity or how it might enhance stability. Secondly, the chapter questions why the interviewees seemed to make a connection between knitting times when changes in their lives have meant they either want to maintain their sense of who they are or change particular identity characteristics. Knitting is associated with various connotations and stereotypes which the knitters can choose to adopt or reject in order to achieve their desired identity. The challenge that many knitters enjoy in their leisure time has been discussed in the previous chapter using Csikszentmihalyi’s (2002 [1992]) notion of flow. This will be expanded upon in this chapter using

Stebbins' (1985) concept of 'serious leisure' to suggest that it is important to some of the women that their leisure time involves something productive and skilled. Lastly, knitting is considered as having positive moral values attached to it. The following key findings will be analysed:

- There are times when knitters get bored or lose their motivation to knit. Sometimes they did not continue when this happened, but most of the time they were determined to finish their projects regardless of their lack of enthusiasm and they continued to start new projects that may present the same issues.
- Knitters could talk about memorable projects they had done in the past. Looking back at previous projects could also be facilitated by the website *Ravelry* where knitters can document their knitted projects, successes and failures, and their stash of yarn waiting to be used. When I asked the women about favourite projects they often discussed the events that were happening in their lives whilst they were doing the knitting.
- Respondents frequently said that they had started to knit, or had re-learned, in response to a change in circumstances such as pregnancy, bereavement, or a new job.
- Women said that they enjoyed knitting because it was an activity that resulted in a tangible end product that they could be satisfied with. They also said that they liked that other people could see visible evidence of the time and effort they had spent making something.
- The knitters said that it was important to them that they made something functional and useful rather than merely aesthetic. However, they also continued to knit things when they no longer needed them.
- The interviewees valued being able to fill their spare time, time when they were waiting for something else or attending a talk or lecture, or casual leisure time, with a useful and enjoyable activity, and a way to avoid feeling idle or restless

7.2 Making memories

In this section knitting is viewed as enabling us to locate our past and therefore present selves. Part of identity making is the ability to look back at who one was in the past in order to understand the present and look to the future (Horsdal, 2012). The section responds to the stories that participants told me about their knitted projects from the past, for example, one of the questionnaire respondents commented, '*holidays, car journeys, evenings in front of the fire, illness - all of those memories are in that blanket* (Q3). Singer (2004: 438) suggests that '[t]o understand the identity formation process is to understand how individuals craft narratives from experiences'. These narratives form our '[a]utobiographical memories' which involve the creation of who we used to be, 'a sense of self at some time in the past' (Horsdal, 2012:49). This section will suggest that knitted objects and the act of knitting can represent and trigger memories such as this that are therefore vital in identity formation.

Stability and a sense of self might stem from the ability to recall knitted objects from the past that we could term a 'knitted autobiography'. Findings from across the research stages suggest people often told me about personal stories and memories when remembering knitting projects or talking about current ones. This finding reflects Horsdal's (2012) suggestion that objects can both trigger memories and help people tell stories about themselves. Turney (2004:274) discusses how hand crafters who keep a record of what they make give value to their work by both reifying the individual object and placing it within a developing timeline, by 'demonstrating and recording its significance as a collection, [makers are] creating its own linear history with one object following another, as well as valorising each item's worth as a subject'. Similarly, Orton-Johnson (2012) describes the online versions of this history which commonly appear on knitting blogs and are a major part of *Ravelry* where knitters can upload pictures of in progress and finished projects. She suggests this gives authenticity to what the knitters have made and redefines our understanding of women's leisure as private and without value. Through

telling others about their knitted autobiographies women are publicising the existence and value of their knitting in ways we are perhaps more used to seeing in artist catalogues and museum collections.

When I asked the interviewees to describe a memorable project most described something that was knitted in particular circumstances or for a particular person rather than, for example, describing something that was particularly challenging. The knitted items seemed to be able to tell a story back to the knitter, for example another questionnaire respondent said *'If I see something I have made I can remember making it and what life was like during that time'* (Q6) and Chloe said *'I really like it because I find if I knit while I'm travelling if I look at the piece afterwards I kind of remember where I made it'*. Nancy mentioned buying a *'yarn souvenir'* to remind her of a holiday, as did Laura. Penny commented that knitting was a way to *'recapture'* her childhood and remind her of her mother. Remembering the past may give a sense of stability. There may be a reassurance of knowing who one was in the past and who one is now by referencing places and people through knitted objects.

The sensory and bodily involvement in the process of knitting might exaggerate the potential to tell stories about our past and our present. Krasner (2005) and Tobin (1996) both suggest that the truth or untruth of the narrative that objects and memories tell us does not matter, rather that memory is about locating ourselves physically and socially now. Although the knitters I spoke to rarely talked about the memory of wearing their knitting, they did however speak about the physical experience of knitting and the feeling of the yarn passing through their fingers. The memory of knitting was embodied, as discussed above as a way of knowing (Jenkins, 2004). Horsdal (2012: 65) similarly suggests that we make identity through the stories we tell and our physical surroundings,

Identity work encompasses both the temporal aspects and the interpersonal relationships in old and new contexts...Identity is primarily a narrative construction, based, however, on embodied experience in interaction with the environment.

Remembering knitted projects from the past may facilitate indirect social interaction as the knitter conjures memories of the relationships they had in the past. For some of the sample knitting reminded them of their mothers and grandmothers, and of the people who have worn items they have produced. They also describe members of the public approaching them if they are knitting and telling them about their own memories of the female knitters they grew up with. Knappett (2002) talks of objects as enabling life after death, as they remain as physical reminders of people and feelings from the past. In the case of knitting sometimes the objects live on, but sometimes the memories and lives are preserved in the action and the process rather than the end products. In these social interactions the knitters draw upon a collection of stories regarding women who knitted in the past, and they themselves may become part of the story for those members of the public who see them knitting. Memories, stories and identities become intertwined, as described by Horsdal (2012:53) who suggests, '[o]ur individuality is founded on, and intertwined with, interpersonal relationships. Our stories include the stories of others, just as we are part of the stories others are telling'.

Most of those interviewed said they had some yarn waiting to be used in their 'stash'. This varied from a small manageable amount to a '*collection*' (Q2), a term which implies some is not necessarily intended for use but preserved for the joy of owning them. Likewise, Tessa said '*there'll always be yarns that are too special to knit and they live in your stash*'. There seemed to be a sense of reassurance gained from having some sort of 'stash', perhaps knowing that there would be no serious threats to their identity as knitters whilst the stash was in existence. Stalp and Winge (2008) propose that knitters' stashes are important to their sense of self and identity as a knitter. Those interviewees who used the 'queue' feature on *Ravelry* told me about how they enjoyed reordering their future patterns, matching patterns with yarn in their stash and seemed to enjoy the stability of knowing what they would be knitting next even if when the time came they might change their mind, '*I've got a Ravelry queue*

of hope and expectation' (Gail). It could be suggested that knitting gives some sense of stability in an unstable world and that it serves to remind them of part of who they were/are and what they have done, are doing and will do in the future.

7.3 Knitting at times of change

This section discusses how interviewees learnt to knit, re-learnt, or had an altered relationship with knitting in response to changing circumstances in their lives such as becoming a mother or grandmother, or mental illness. Knitting seemed to be a way to change how they saw themselves, maintain an identity, or take on some of the qualities associated with knitting. They turned to knitting, most deliberately but some by chance, as a way to shape themselves into the roles or types of person they wished to be. For example, Bridie used practical aspects of knitting to distract her from comfort eating during a period of mourning. Additionally, Gail, a new mother, said she used knitting as a way to both regain her sense of individuality and also take on aspects of her new role as a mother. The decision to knit could be viewed as a technique of shaping oneself into the type of person we wish to be. Horsdal (2012:65) describes how identity is created through an ongoing and aspirational process where past, present and future hopes, values and roles interact,

Identity work is about becoming. When we encounter transitions in the trajectories of our lifelong journeys we are confronted with the question of identity: How will this transformation influence my interpretation of self? What self will emerge in interactions in new places, new relationships, and new situations? And how will this emerging self connect to, or transform, prior interpretations and constructions of self and identity?

There is arguably an historical association between motherhood and knitting which, amongst some interviewees, still exists. It could be suggested that knitting facilitates indirect social interaction as women consider the expectations and stereotypes of other people that they may or may not themselves share. They are not directly interacting with other people, but are instead interacting with other people's ideas. New babies are traditionally given knitted gifts and Chloe said that her mother only knitted when friends and neighbours were preparing for new arrivals into their families. When one of my friends learnt to knit her mother assumed she was going to announce her pregnancy. Dilly and Scranton (2005) warn researchers who are studying serious leisure activities not to see leisure time in isolation but to consider the impact of events outside of leisure. They argue that 'parenthood remains an important identity that requires consideration in any analysis of leisure' as it has a considerable impact on available time and identity (Dilly and Scranton, 2009: 129). Debra, started knitting when pregnant and said '*I had this vision of producing knitting for this baby*'. She also exhibited some of the time pressures that Dilly and Scranton (2009) imply as she describes using knitting to prevent her working in the evenings and having to balance the demands of her children with her desire to keep knitting. Ivy described starting to knit when she discovered she was going to have a nephew. She felt it was an '*aunty-ish thing to do*' suggesting she saw knitting as a part of the new identity she wished to adopt. Debra and Ivy associated the values of providing textiles and care as articulating the values of a woman with a new baby in her life. Significantly both did not limit their knitting to these children, instead it has become a valued part of their life beyond these altruistic origins.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, Gail experienced a changing relationship to knitting, an activity that was already a big part of her life, during her first pregnancy and after the birth of her child. During her pregnancy she had largely knitted items for the baby and afterwards had been too tired and distracted to knit anything but the simplest of patterns. However, at the time of our interview she had just begun a lace scarf. She described this as a way for her to find a new identity for herself, negotiating between the woman she was

and the mother she had become. It was important to her that she was using expensive yarn, a complicated pattern and that the shawl was for herself not for her baby or other people. Jurczyk (1998) considers time to be socially constructed and gendered, and our use of time integral to our identities. She suggests that we need patterns of behaviour in order to use our time efficiently in terms of physical and emotional energy, and therefore when changes in everyday life happen we have to re-establish patterns of how we use our time. Gail seems to have used knitting as a way to do this, returning to a remembered use of time which is more congruent with how she sees herself as a not only a mother.

This example helps us to see how the knitters might sometimes use knitting very deliberately as a tool to explore their identities after times of change, and in particular the relationship between women's caring roles and their knitting. Considering how Gail, Ivy and Debra link motherhood (or 'aunty-hood') and knitting, we could suggest these women's knitting goes further than merely picking up upon traditions of knitting to demonstrate caring for children. In the second example it seems easier to see how Gail's identity and relationship to knitting is more complicated and is about her independence, autonomy and self-care, as well as dictated by simple practicalities of time and energy. In this light it could also be suggested that Ivy's assertion that knitting is what an aunty should do, might be motivated by a desire to explore how she saw herself in relation to the changes in her family in addition to her role in relation to the new baby. Learning to knit might have been for herself, as a stable link between her identity as an individual and her identity as an aunt.

Kraus (2014) studied belly dancing as a serious leisure activity and proposed that women tend to choose leisure pursuits which allow them to express their femininity and cope with life transitions. Kraus (2014:570) found that, similar to the knitters I interviewed, the leisure activity helped them cope with changes such as 'having fewer familial obligations, shifting careers, moving, entering or leaving school and beginning or ending of a romantic relationship.' As discussed in the previous section, landmarks of the knitter's lives are woven

into their creations. Wills (2007) suggests there is a link between the transformation of identity in becoming a mother and the transformation of yarn into fabric, knitting embodying an ethos of productivity and care. Additionally, serious leisure activities, expanded upon below, allow access to a social world which offers the potential of support through life changes which is discussed in the next theme.

Along with the value-based associations of knitting, whether with caring or with a remembered sense of self, there are practical aspects of knitting which women spoke about in dealing with traumas and changes in their lives. A couple of the interviewees spoke about knitting benefitting their mental health whilst suffering from depression or insomnia. This is echoed by Fisk (2012) who writes insightfully about her experiences of knitting and depression. The link between mental health and knitting has been discussed in the literature (Corkhill, 2014). There are practical reasons for taking up knitting, for example

‘when I was 21 my fiancé was killed and I put on a huge amount of weight over one winter and I decided I needed to lose it and one of the best ways to do that was to knit because you can’t nibble while you’re knitting because you just can’t pick something up so that’s precisely why I started doing it in any earnestness and I’ve never stopped really’ (Bridie).

For Olive, suffering from insomnia, knitting offered a way to make her sleepless nights more bearable by engaging her in a fruitful activity. For Zoe knitting was a way to feel productive at a time when she was ill and could not do anything else, *‘it was actually brilliant to feel although I felt really ill and I couldn’t do very much I could actually do that’*.

7.4 Serious knitting, serious leisure

This section considers findings which suggest knitting offers women the opportunity to spend their leisure time in a productive and challenging activity.

It will be argued that knitting is an activity involved in the process of self-development achieved through hard work. Weber and Mitchell (2004) describe how through our interactions with objects we can create the sense of self we aspire to have. Whiting and Hannam (2014) recently suggested that leisure as a site of consumption had been studied in relation to identity but that leisure activities as sites of production remain understudied. Given that we may look increasingly towards our leisure time rather than a single career path to define ourselves, it is pertinent to consider a productive leisure activity such as knitting in relation to an aspirational process of identity making (Green, 1998). Knitting will be positioned as an activity requiring work and determination, before outlining how we can view it as a 'serious leisure' activity (Stebbins, 1985). Finally the section explores how using the idea of serious leisure activities can help interpret what rewards stem from the not inconsiderable investment of time and effort that participants devote to their knitting.

Some leisure activities might be thought of as fun and carefree, or leisure time could be considered as spare time, to enjoy rather than fill. Contrastingly, participants filled their leisure time with knitting, an activity which is fun and relaxing but that is also boring, hard work, and relentless. Jane and Olive both described barriers to overcome to keep knitting, both in terms of motivation and physical fatigue. Jane said *'it's kind of like going walking in the hills there's a point where you just have to keep going'*. Olive found physical constraints to her knitting,

purling isn't my favourite I'm hyper mobile so I find that probably the most tiring on my hands so if I've got a lot of purling I just I maybe have to take more regular breaks and I maybe get more frustrated that I'm not progressing as I'd like ...but other than that I enjoy it because I have that determination that I will get it done keep going keep going but I'll complain about it all.

Some knitters required tactics to maintain motivation. For example Elaine, who knitted at every opportunity and had her own knitting shop, said even she struggled for motivation at times and knew she needed to work on something

regularly or risk never returning to it, *'I've been working on that dress maybe a month or two yeah so that's you know I kind of I need to pick it up again actually maybe tonight because it's been sitting there for too long and I feel like I'm going to lose my motivation'*. For Gemma *'guilt'* over wasting yarn and desire to be finished forced her to continue working on a project, *'it's more of a oh this has been sitting here for a long time this is really nice expensive wool I really need to have another go no it tends to be a oh I need to finish this project so it's not in my life anymore'*. Someone reading this statement might assume Gemma found the process of knitting tedious or unenjoyable, meaning she was eager to not have it *'in my life anymore'*. In actuality Gemma was enthusiastic about knitting as a part of her creative lifestyle. This illustrates a key aspect of knitting that this section explores – that knitters see the investment of time and effort, guilt, frustration and stress, as worth the recompense they receive from devoting leisure time to knitting.

Knitting as a leisure activity which conversely requires hard 'work' can be interpreted using Stebbins' (1992) theory of 'serious leisure' to provide insights into why these women might choose to spend their free time knitting rather than in casual activities such as watching television. Developing the notion of flow experiences as requiring the complete devotion of attention, Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [2002]: 239) suggests, 'a good life is one that is characterised by complete absorption in what one does'. Similarly, Stebbins suggests that engaging in serious leisure brings benefits which are core to our psychological wellbeing and identity development. Five core properties of serious leisure activities are explored in turn here and mapped onto the interviewee's comments regarding knitting. These are: lack of financial recompense, enjoyment, a sense of obligation, development of skills through training, and participation in a social world with its own ethos. Fulfilment of serious leisure activities, according to Stebbins, results in self-expression and enjoyment as will be discussed.

Firstly, Stebbins defines serious leisure as not resulting in financial recompense or this not being a primary motivation for undertaking the activity.

The previous section established that the knitters were motivated by intrinsic motivation and a desire for an end product which fulfilled their requirements. This fits in with Stebbins (1985:260) suggestion that

[t]here is a devotion to these forms of serious leisure that suggests they would be practiced regardless of the financial gain or loss that adheres to them. If a substantial amount of money is made in them, that is but one reward of many and, it appears from the evidence at hand, one of the least significant.

Elaine and Chloe were the only interviewees for whom knitting was part of their income, one owned a knitting shop and another designed patterns. However, they were both clear that they would knit regardless of this income, evidenced in the amount of time they spent knitting on non-paid projects.

Secondly, participants look forward to the activity or look back on it fondly. Studies into various serious leisure activities often find that the activities are very time intensive, as knitting can be, and that participants tend to organise the rest of their lives around the activity (for example Tomlinson, 1993; Gillespie et al, 2002; Stalp and Conti, 2009). Although some of the knitters did set aside time for their knitting groups, for most of them knitting was an activity which slotted around their other commitments, perhaps making it an ideal and unusual form of serious leisure in its flexibility. In this respect it meets some of the demands Raisborough (2006) identified as barriers for women in serious leisure activities such as not wanting to be out by oneself late at night and not being able to devote large blocks of time to activities outside of the home.

Thirdly, there may be a sense of obligation or responsibility but this is often viewed positively rather than resented. This is discussed later in this chapter. Fourthly, serious leisure requires perseverance through a 'career' path, and the development of skills and acquisition of knowledge through training. This principle maps onto Csikszentmihalyi's (2002 [1992]) concept of flow as requiring the matching of skills and challenge, discussed above. Skill acquisition and self-development was important to the knitters. Almost all of

the sample talked frequently about enjoying the challenge and potential to learn things that knitting presented to them. Knitters talked about enjoying that knitting has small progressions, with new stitches built on combinations of old ones. The training was not formalised, although some attended one-off courses. Most learnt in a more tacit fashion, from observing others at knitting groups, through trial and error, and using the internet to access an international community of knitters. 'Knitalongs' (where a large group of people all knit the same project at a similar pace) could be viewed as offering an informal training. Gail commented that during knitalongs she looked online for support if she was struggling as she knew there would be people who were ahead of her in the pattern. In order to access this training and community of knowledge there was a language of terminology and pattern names and designers that the knitters repeatedly referred to, although one knitter was keen to point out this was open to new members rather than excluding them.

Stebbins (1992) divides those who engage in serious leisure into different categories such as hobbyists and amateurs. The key difference between these categories is that amateur activities have a professional counterpart. This is useful in the case of knitting in order to consider the goals of knitters in terms of their progression. Hobbyists do not have professional aspirations but they may have long term goals. The knitters interviewed for this research did not seem to present long reaching goals in a clear form, for example there was very little reference to a project or technique which would symbolise success in their field. However, none could foresee a circumstance when they would give up knitting, although some went through periods of not knitting, either seasonal or because of other commitments. Some could not conceive of not having at least something on their needles to pick up if they wanted to. These knitters were committed to their leisure activity, but did not necessarily have the sense of a career progression that Stebbins suggests amateurs have. Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [2005]) suggests that clearly defined goals and purposes are useful in focusing attention in flow experiences, but that they are not ends in themselves, this may explain why the knitters do not have a specific

career path or goals, but do focus their attention on seeking more difficult patterns.

There is not a formal progression in skill or achievement in knitting, unlike serious leisure activities that have a structure of awards or levels. However, some placed designers on a hierarchy, as discussed in Section 6.2. Spinning yarn offered some the next step they needed to feel a sense of progression. Most didn't actively seek new techniques but tended to be drawn to patterns which at least offered some new stitches or construction method. Knitters do not tend to compare themselves to others, instead they are seen as either having or not having the inherent creative ability to design patterns, as discussed in the previous section. On the whole, they did not view any patterns as inaccessible to them because of being too hard, it was designing patterns that, for some, was seen as unachievable. This is potentially a misconception as those who had tried making their own patterns and were confident in making modifications mainly portrayed this as another skill alongside different techniques.

If anything, progression through a knitting career path was measured in years knitting, and the social network and pattern management site Ravelry facilitates knitters to upload images of each project in order that they can keep a public visual timeline of their knitting. The acquisition of new skills was important to the knitters and leads to a loose 'career' structure of more sophisticated patterns. Penny said she felt you could *'improve yourself'*, leading to a feeling of pride and self-enrichment. However, unlike some leisure activities such as Munro-bagging (where hillwalkers try to walk, or 'bag', all Scottish mountains that are over 3000 feet in height) the knitters did not knit primarily to tick skills or projects off a list or to compete with others, rather they seemed to *'sort of feed off other peoples happiness'* (Sophie) and achievements. This was a shared rather than individualistic career structure with some sense of improving knitting as a community and developing the craft for future knitters. Knitting therefore can be seen as a self-reflexive activity within a community, where 'the teleonomy of the self is thus a growth principle;

the optimal level of challenge stretches existing skills' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [2002]: 244).

Fifthly, there is a social world surrounding these activities with a specific ethos and set of behaviours and values. The community surrounding knitting is discussed in the following chapter. Knitting is a form of serious leisure which is arguably particularly suited to contemporary life and in particular women's experiences. Whereas some leisure activities require specialist times and environments, knitting can be done in most places and fills spare moments of time as it can easily be picked up and put down. With economic pressures, such as stemming from the recession experienced in the UK during the first decade of the twentieth century, some forms of leisure which require specialist equipment may not be viable, whereas knitting can be done with relatively cheap equipment, although attitudes towards cheaper synthetic yarns reveal some disapproval, discussed in the next chapter. Women still have more caring and domestic responsibilities and yet also increasingly are the main wage earners (more men lost their jobs in the recent economic recession) (Banyard, 2010). Knitting may therefore offer women a leisure activity which is not so demanding as to be impractical. However, this is not to say that knitting is not taken as seriously by some of the knitters as activities which might require more time to be set aside. For example, there were instances where the knitters discussed asking their children to wait to speak to them until they had finished their row, or how they had not gone to bed until very late because they had wanted to finish the section they were working on.

Knitting might offer an important combination of skills and freedom. Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1980]) found that his sample spent about 30% of their leisure time doing activities out of obligation rather than choice, additionally he found that the sample were more likely to be using their skills in paid work rather than leisure. Therefore, knitting as serious leisure offers an ideal and perhaps distinctive combination of a voluntary activity that requires skill. Knitting may be an activity which answers to some extent the concern that as long as 'intrinsic motivation is restricted to leisure, and work and maintenance

activities produce a grim sense of alienation, life will be split into useless play and senseless work' by offering a useful play and leisure work (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 2014 [1983]:124). However, the extent to which knitting is useful, or the extent to which women are making work out of obligation is discussed later in this section, considering the moral value attached to productivity.

7.5 Productivity and obligation

This section analyses how knitters described knitting as a way to be productive and useful. Knitters said they valued being productive in their leisure activity and sometimes contrasted this with activities such as watching television which could be called 'casual leisure' activities (Stebbins, 1985). For example Olive said

it's just that physical feeling of I'm doing something useful it's not something that's throw away I could not sit in front of the computer and play games all day every day because I would think what have I done with my time a waste of time other people might see it.

Productivity and usefulness as components of serious leisure activities were introduced as aspects of creativity in Chapter 6, and are developed here in terms of narratives of guilt attached to wasting time and moral value assigned to avoiding idleness. For example in the quote above Olive is concerned with how other people would view her use of time if she spent it in leisure activities which were not '*useful*'. This chapter examines how the knitters are interacting with different value systems and the expectations they have of themselves and others place on them, as Horsdal (2012:100) describes, 'From the polyphony of samples of life story narratives common cultural narratives emerge... In the analyses of each story we discover how the individual narrator negotiates meaning between different cultural narratives.'

Some of the knitters used knitting as a way to avoid feeling guilty or idle when they had spare time, such as when waiting to collect a child, to combat boredom during an uninspiring talk, or whilst watching television. We could explore this in terms of a work ethic which places value on industriousness and self-reliance. By filling spare time with a leisure activity which fulfils these virtues it legitimises this time for the women involved and potentially for those around them. Discussing a similar ethic in retirement Ekert (1986: 239) says

[t]he work ethic historically has identified work with virtue and has been held up for esteem a conflation of such traits and habits as diligence, initiative... industriousness...and the capacity for deferred gratification.

Ekert suggests that paid work often de-emphasises self-sufficiency and this creates a hesitancy to place moral value on this work and instead people turn to other types of activity to gain self-respect and status, such as serious leisure (Stebbins, 1985). Whilst referring to the experience of retirement, Ekert's ideas could help us to think here about how knitting plays a part in the negotiation of new roles, introduced early in this section, and the roles that we desire or that are placed upon us.

There is a body of research which has empirically demonstrated that women spend less time than men engaging in leisure activities despite the health and emotional benefits (Lafrance, 2011). Women spend the majority of their time in paid work or in care-giving responsibilities leaving them less time to engage in leisure activities. Furthermore, other barriers to leisure that women may face include poverty and lack of material resources, and safety considerations (for example, not wishing to be returning home late at night from evening leisure activities). There has also been found a reluctance to engage in leisure activities despite available resources as they feel they should not be spending this time on themselves (Lafrance, 2011). As has been introduced above, knitting could be considered as facilitating indirect interactions as knitters consider the ideas of other people and societal expectations that may inform their behaviour. Two interviewees referred to themselves as 'selfish knitters' when they knitted for themselves and almost all spent a portion of their leisure

time making things for other people. Olive said, *'I think maybe I'm going to end up a selfish knitter'* and Gail commented *'I used to be a completely selfish knitter and enjoyed it but actually you can only have so many knitted goods in your house especially if you don't knit jumpers I think I'm about to hit the maximum number of lace shawls a person needs'*. In sewing rather than knitting the same terminology is used, for example 'imagine gnats', a sewing blog, hosts an annual 'Selfish Sewing Week' to encourage women (this is not made explicit but all graphics show only women) to sew something for themselves not their children.

Gilligan (1982: 62) influentially suggested that there was an expectation, in dominant gender norms, that women should place the needs of other over themselves, 'seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining a web of connection'. Like Jenkins (2004), Gilligan (1982: 63) views identity as based on interactions with others, saying 'we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others'. The potential of knitting to build relationships is explored in Chapter 8, but it is useful to discuss here briefly how knitting fits in, or not, with Gilligan's (1982) thesis that women are expected to spend their time in the care of others, something she terms an 'ethic of care'. That many of the interviewees spend some or most of their leisure time making something for someone else, to keep them warm, brighten their day or feel soft against their skin, could be used in support of the continued existence of an ethic of care. Henderson and Allen (1991) have studied women's use of leisure time, albeit over twenty years ago, and suggest that the notion of an ethic of care can lead women to place the needs of others over their own self-care.

A negotiation between the needs of oneself and others is recognised by some of the interviewees, for example Rosie said

I almost never knit for me and that's one of my New Year resolutions to knit for me I think this year cos last year I think I just knitted a beret which took a couple of hours and that was the only thing I knitted for myself and I did these huge shawls [as gifts] which took me like a month.

Tessa similarly commented that

you were spending all of your free time your hobby relaxing time on a deadline and I used to drive myself completely demented at Christmas time knitting all these gifts and it was really stressful...I used to do too many gifts or commissions like people would say I'll give you the wool and you knit for me and yeah I think I was a bit out of balance for a while and now it's more balanced now I get excited planning for the things I want to make for myself.

Elaine also spoke of striving for a balance in her knitting for herself and as gifts,

with Christmas and Birthdays and stuff I get hit its most tense through September and then March... I have a few birthdays and stuff so I'm usually knitting pretty steadily for those folks...but I kind of try and balance it so last year you know maybe from in October and November I was knitting solidly for other people no projects for myself or anything so that'll probably happen again.

Women could participate in knitting because it offers a way to fulfil their caring observations but also engage in something beneficial for themselves. Lafrance (2011) found that women negotiated societal expectations that they should organise their time around other people by using several strategies. If we define leisure time as existing in opposition to time spent on obligations and work then to some extent everyone would have to balance how much time they devoted to these different parts of their lives. However, in this case particular attention is given to 'how women weave leisure into and from the wider textures of their lives' (Raisborough, 2006:246). Lafrance (2011) found that women justified their leisure by comparing it to men's activities. Laura said that men tended to not be able to multitask whereas she could do other things whilst knitting and Olive positioned her use of leisure time in relation to a computer gamer, justifying her knitting by comparing it to the gamer who had nothing to show at the end of their time. Lafrance (2011) also found that women used

spiritual or mystical language to construct their *need* for leisure time. Although knitting does not have the link with nature that Lafrance (2011) identified in activities such as walking, some of the interviewees did express a *need* for knitting or creativity which bordered on the spiritual as they spoke about how it kept them, euphemistically, from '*killing someone*' (Gemma). Others, as has been mentioned, presented it as outside of their control.

An additional strategy to the ones Lafrance (2011) identifies can be seen in the interviews centering on the choice of spending leisure time in a domestic activity which results in products which have functional as well as aesthetic value even if they are done for the self rather than for others thus justifying the time invested. Whilst Fields (2014) found that the knitting group he studied located their knitting in relation to their professional rather than their social or domestic lives, some of the knitters I spoke to, even when talking about the hard work of knitting, located this in terms of the domestic and the personal, family orientated through gift giving, and taking place in private spaces such as in front of the television. This was not however, always the case, with others taking their knitting to their workplaces. Although women's lives are not limited to the domestic space and their roles identified in relation to those who they care for, Bourdieu (1986:209) suggests that some aspects of the habitus of a group can be retained 'beyond a – relative – transformation of the material conditions of access'.

Knitting no longer needs to be done out of necessity for the women in this study. They do not need to spend their leisure time productively, yet some of the notion that women should be productive may remain in the respondent's rejection of watching television without knitting as idleness and to be avoided, a feeling that leisure time should be spent making knitted items for other people, and in an association between motherhood and knitting. This is not to say that women are 'cultural dopes' unquestioningly accepting a situation placed on them by others and failing to 'assert their right to leisure' (Lafrance, 2011: 81), rather it is to demonstrate the complex value system which women are negotiating within their leisure time, perhaps heightened in an activity such

as knitting which is enmeshed in productivity and service. Through their productivity women can engage in self-care (through the positive outcomes of flow) and care of others (through the production of gifts). The benefits for building one's social capital are discussed in the next chapter demonstrating how investment in others can also be investment in self.

Deem (1996) suggests that women use leisure to disrupt the normal intensification of time they experience in their working and home lives where multitasking and fulfilling the needs of others might result in a feeling of lack of control and autonomy. It is interesting to consider knitting today, nearly twenty years since Deem was writing, in this light. Some of the women I interviewed did protect their knitting time from interruption by, for example, making clear to friends and family when their knitting group night was. They also described one of their motivations for attending knitting group being regular time set aside to knit that would not be impinged upon from other responsibilities or activities. For example, Olive said *'my boyfriend ... he knows Thursday night are knitting nights and we will plan things around a Thursday'* and Sophie commented *'I do my very best to preserve my Thursday evenings for knitting ... so my husband and my non knitting friends know that I'm never going to be available on a Thursday and I do my very best to make sure I'm in Edinburgh'*. However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, knitting might not wholly disrupt intensification of time, for example many knitters thought watching television without knitting might be wasting time and during knitting group meetings they combined knitting with socialising.

If our interactions with objects make visible some of the norms and values which drive and govern us then they can also make visible inner conflict between social expectations and personal desires as, for example, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found with objects in the home. That these women have chosen to devote their leisure time to an activity which they partly describe as important because it allows them to be productive and avoid idleness, may make visible some of the tensions within contemporary femininity. Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1978]:3) describes this tension in terms of

what we give our attention to, “[h]ow attention is allocated determines the shape and content of one’s life. Social systems, through the process of socialization, compete with the individual for the structuring of his attention.’ Therefore, where there is tension between the society’s demands on one’s attention and our individual wishes some negotiation is required. These women have found one way to access leisure and balance it with the rest of their lives, and achieve both ‘*subjectively valued experiences*’ and ‘*socially valued goals*’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [1978]:3).

The negotiation of knitting for oneself and knitting for others can be viewed as a negotiation between roles. Johnson and Lloyd (2004) suggest that feminist writing of the 1960s and 1970s deliberately framed housework as the demonised ‘other’ and centred on paid work outside the home as a valorised source of identity and fulfilment. They suggest this has created a problematic situation today where home-making and associated activities retained negative connotations. They offer an alternative where the home should be a space for individuality and meaning making, where we can form our identities and build strong relationships with others. Wills (2007: 49) agrees, suggesting that women have experienced ‘discrepancy between the female identity crafted by a previous generation and the identity these women wished to create for themselves’. Viewed in this way the home becomes a vital area for identification to take place. This is not to suggest that knitting can or is only done within the home. Whilst some of the interviewees said that knitting was a private activity, done only on their own sofas, others took their knitting to seminars, on trains and to knitting groups, all public spaces. However, I am suggesting that academic attention to contemporary knitting might have predominantly been concentrated on the more glamorous and public components such as activism and artworks, because the more domestic knitting seemed less important both in comparison and because of the lack of consideration of the home as an important part of our identities and therefore site for study.

Stebbins (1985:267) suggests that leisure time not associated with challenge and skill, which he terms 'casual' leisure (and contrasts with serious leisure discussed below) 'ultimately tends to cause spiritual dyspepsia', arguing that mindless leisure activities can be alienating and demoralising. Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1978]) suggests it is crucial that activities such as knitting are done by choice, in contrast to times when we are required to devote our attention, a limited resource, to tasks we do not want to do. He adds this giving up of attention can result in alienation. Some of the knitters said they thought about knitting when they were doing other things, perhaps as a way to deal with 'alienated attention' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [1978]:13).

Knitting, as a productive leisure activity, could be a response to technology which increasingly seeks to make our lives easier. Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [2005]) suggests that this encourages passivity and that we learn to seek immediate gratification and avoid challenges. Instead, he suggests, as discussed above, that challenge and creativity are vital to our sense of self. He suggests we are, as a society, failing to 'initiate young people into the joys of living' and instead providing them with 'passive entertainment and the reliance of material rewards, and the excessive concern of schools with testing and with disembodied knowledge [which] all militate against learning to enjoy mastering the challenges that life inevitably presents' (Csikszentmihalyi 2014 [2005]:235). Additionally, knitting may serve a dual purpose in offering, in the case of easier, more relaxing projects, Jurczyk's (1998:305) time 'just to be' without potentially feeling like the time is empty or wasted:

The dictate of modernity – which applies to both sexes – that time should always be used productively should be questioned by women, so that there is enough space, time and energy for the new. Time just to be, which appears usefulness, may be the most creative time.

Women might feel an obligation and a desire to use their spare time productively or justify their leisure activity by ensuring it results in something functional. Knitters are negotiating notions of womanhood such as self-care

and caring for others. This is not, however, to say that women are under some form of false consciousness or oppression, or to deny the creativity, fun and agency involved in knitting.

Consideration of the socioeconomic status of the group might provide an additional perspective on these findings, for example, considering this with reference to the work of Stebbins (2006), who does make some references to social class and serious leisure. Stebbins (2006) suggests that people from all social classes participate in casual leisure activities, although taste, money and time do effect the specific activity participants choose. Similarly in project-based leisure (which he posits as the alternative to casual and serious forms) also has a broad spectrum of participants but with some differences in the specific activities favoured by different classes. Serious leisure, Stebbins (2006) suggests, is the only form of leisure where participants tend to come only from the middle-class who are financially secure and educated. Parker (1996) has suggested this may be because the middle class (as the sample in this research could be broadly characterised as) tend to think in terms of a career, both with regards to paid work and how they spend and frame their leisure time. The interviewees did, as discussed above, sometimes describe their knitting with a similar intensity of feeling as one might a career, in terms of building skills and self-critique. Given that those with comparatively less income could still engage in knitting, and may do, it is important to explore further the trend between serious leisure and socioeconomic status.

It is necessary to present some notes of caution in addition to the above presentation of knitting as a serious leisure activity where aspiration and self-development are presented as positive goals alongside a search for fulfilment. The pain is worth the gain, as some participants asserted. Stebbins (2014) adds a warning to this attitude amongst participants of serious leisure activities, saying that this search for achievement or quest for 'flow', discussed in Chapter 6, may be never-ending, become an addiction, or increase the participant's selfish self-preoccupation. This is not to say there was particular evidence of these negative consequences of serious leisure in the interviews,

but rather to suggest that just because knitting or leisure activities appear familiar and harmless, that they might not be indicative of wider personality traits or even socially approved and encouraged patterns of thought that might be more negative than they at first appear. Additionally, if activities such as knitting are framed in the literature and on the internet in certain ways, i.e. about challenge and seeking 'authenticity' (as discussed in the next chapter) then this might reflect negatively on those who do not participate for these motives. If there is a link between serious leisure and socioeconomic status then perhaps those who do not knit as a serious leisure activity but for other reasons who have fallen outside the scope of this research and who might be from lower classes are potentially doubly excluded from discourse and potentially judged for their different values. Congruent with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), these hunches and speculations are noted here for the benefit of triggering research in this areas which may be achieved through using a theoretical sample aimed at accessing these particular groups.

Summary

The previous chapter discussed the short term continuity of experiencing flow within a project and the medium term continuity provided by the never-ending and overlapping sequence of knitted projects. This chapter has developed this notion to consider how knitting provides continuity over the course of the knitter's lifetime. This chapter has discussed how knitting can be understood as being productive in two respects:

1. Producing memories and identities:
 - a. through thinking and talking about things they have made in the past women can tell stories about the relationships they had with

other people, the places they were when they made and wore their knitted items, and the events that happened during their production.

- b. Knitters can also look to the future and know that, whatever else happens, their stash of yarn and 'to do' list of projects means they will still be a knitter.
 - c. A number of the knitters associated knitting with times of change in their lives when knitting too provided a sense of continuity with old identities and helped them deal with change. For others knitting was used as a way to change the way they or others saw themselves, for example upon becoming a mother. Although involved in a change in role knitting remains associated with continuity as the women use it to perpetuate some of the norms and values of the habitus, as will be discussed more in the next chapter.
2. Knitting provides the opportunity for women to use their leisure time in a productive and challenging way:
- a. Knitting can be part of self-development through acquiring new skills and investing considerable time in a routine of knitting and knitting groups. Of leisure identities that require this investment of time knitting seems an advantageous choice as it can easily fit round other activities and responsibilities and is portable so can be done in spare time such as whilst travelling or waiting for an appointment. In this respect knitting as a productive way to use leisure time seems positive. Through feeling productive knitters can see the value of their time, feel fulfilled, and focus on values such as delayed gratification and welcoming challenge, values that technology may serve to discourage in other parts of their lives.
 - b. Contrastingly, women can also feel obliged to spend their leisure time this way rather than choosing to. Knitters interact with traditional ideals of femininity where women's where leisure time

can be problematic. Through knitting women are able to act upon an ethic of care, devoting some of their leisure time to making things for other people. However, the balance between obligation and enjoyment as motivations to make things for others varies.

This exploration of knitting as producing memories, roles and identities, further contributes to a sense that identity is an ongoing process which is not only formed through direct social interactions. From remembering the people who were there during the production, or received, a knitted item, to considering general societal expectations, the knitters spoke of interacting with other people in indirect ways. They did not only rely on face-to-face contact or the internet to feel connected to other people or for their identities to be shaped by them. Instead the process of knitting and the knitted objects may be used as ways to mediate interactions and negotiate between their past and present senses of self and their future aspirations, and between what they felt society expected of them and what they needed from their leisure time.

Chapter 8 Knitting with others, the ‘*common thread*’: Theme 3

Introduction

This chapter explores findings relating to the interactions the knitters reported they had with other knitters and with non-knitters, including their family, friends and strangers. Although the previous chapters touched upon some of these interactions, this chapter looks explicitly at social interaction and social capital. Findings suggest that communities exist around knitting and knitters that are both local and international, online and offline. Women told me how much they valued the social interactions that they accessed through their knitting; for example Olive said ‘*I wouldn’t continue knitting if I didn’t have the social aspect*’.

This chapter looks firstly at the interactions knitters have with each other as Olive describes above and the interactions they have with non-knitters. The knitters discussed gift-giving and social interactions, but given that handmade gifts have been explored elsewhere in the literature (for example Turney, 2012; Winge and Stamp, 2013 and Purbrick, 2014), and touched upon already in this thesis in relation to obligation (see Chapter 7), they are only discussed briefly here in order to devote more space to other themes. The second section in the chapter conceptualises the social interactions knitters describe. using the concept of ‘social capital’ informed by authors such as Putnam (2000). This section interprets the findings using Putnam’s (2000) notion of bonds, based on similarities between people, and bridges that span social differences. The chapter considers what technical and personal support the knitters might receive from other members of the knitting community. The chapter then looks at what women told me about who was included and excluded from various knitting communities and identities. The self-imposed, economic, or cultural

distinctions between knitters and between knitters and those who do not knit are explored. The analysis uses ideas derived from Bourdieu (1984) and Campbell (2005) to understand how and why particular values might prevail amongst the knitters interviewed. Although social class was not explicitly mentioned by the interviewees, discussion draws on implied thoughts on social class and the economic factors involved in knitting. Notions of inequality in leisure time that are suggested by Putnam (2000) and Roberts (2004) are used to consider how knitting might not be accessible to everyone. This is important to consider as exclusion from leisure activities might be an avenue for future research which seeks to address social inequalities. This chapter builds on the previous two to again consider how knitting might be motivated more by the consequences of the process rather than a desire for the final physical items that are produced.

At this point it is worth noting that although the interviewees described community in a relatively simple way this may be underpinned by a much more complex structure. As discussed further below there was some evidence in the interviews that there were exclusions from the community described and that there were certain types of knitting which were approved of more than others. It is important to note here that the portrayal of community in the simplified form of exchanges of social capital is a considerable simplification. This can partly be attributed to data analysis and identification of patterns in what the women told me of their experiences. However, it is likely that participants themselves also simplified to some extent their relationships and interactions with other knitters in order to present to me a clear and coherent narrative which captured the core aspects of their experience. It is therefore a partial picture that is developed in this chapter (as with the thesis as a whole) and further research could explore further the complexity of interactions, the hierarchies of power, and the inequalities of access within this community.

This chapter is based on key findings that include:

- Some interviewees attributed a large part of their enjoyment and motivation to the knitting group or groups they attend. They spoke of them with affection.
- Some who did not have direct social interaction with other knitters through knitting groups had a variety of different forms of contact with an international knitting community through podcasts and the website *Ravelry*. *Ravelry* was used for activities such as browsing the projects completed and uploaded by other people, commenting in forums, and organising group activities to happen both online and in person.
- Knitters spoke about taking easier projects to their groups or later ripping out what they had done at knitting group because they were too distracted by the conversation to properly concentrate on their own knitting.
- The interviewees said they received both technical and personal support from their knitting group or via the internet.
- There was a sense of continuity to the community as some felt that knitting connected them to women who had knitted and made textiles in the past and that they were passing on the skill to future generations.
- The conversations that happened at knitting groups involved topics such as knitting techniques but also wide range of issues relating to members' personal lives.
- Some interviewees identified different types of knitter such as those who were only temporarily interested in knitting because it was fashionable or those involved in activism such as yarn bombing. At the extreme, Penny said some people would '*make a wee shapeless jumper*' whilst others were motivated by a desire to '*improve yourself*'. She seemed to distinguish between two types of knitting –
 - Easier knitting and knitting simpler items such as to donate to a charity

- Knitting which was intellectually demanding that she was more interested in.
- There were mixed feelings about whether knitters were certain types of people, some participants did not feel this was the case whereas others felt passionately that they *knew* they would get on with any other knitter.
- Knitting requires an investment of time and money which might prevent some people, who cannot afford these investments, from taking part.

8.2 Knitting bonds

Interviewees often saw knitting as a link between people and a '*common thread*' (Sophie) between women who knitted. This section examines the social world that Stebbins (1992) suggests often exists around serious leisure activities (see Section 7.4). The social benefits of serious leisure activities remain understudied, according to Dilley and Scraton (2010) as they suggest Stebbins has tended to underestimate the significance of socialising for serious leisure participants, focusing instead on individual benefits and motivations. They suggest that serious leisure activities

'appear to be defined by traditional masculine values of action, challenge and mastery, as opposed to the more traditionally feminine activities of creating meaningful interpersonal relationships and intimate spaces, which are seen to be casual and 'frivolous' (Dilley and Scraton, 2010:127).

This echoes Pinker's (2014) assertion that women's socialising has tended to be absent from research more widely. The section begins by outlining the type of community formed around the knitting groups and shops in Edinburgh that participants spoke about. The experience of belonging and fitting in is discussed before suggesting that knitting is used by women to access meaningful social interaction. Secondly, the section considers social

interactions outside of knitting groups, indirectly with the idea of women knitters in the past, and directly with strangers who build temporary bonds with the knitters. This section sets up notions of community and support which are expanded upon using Putnam (2000) to explore how knitting is 'bonding', creating relationships based on the shared experience of knitting, but also 'bridging', creating relationships that span social boundaries. These bonds and bridges can be direct, for example with strangers who approach the knitter or with other knitting group members, or indirect, for example with the idea of knitters in the past or with the idea of a knitting community (with no direct interaction).

8.2.1 Knitting bonds within knitting groups

This part of the section considers bonds between knitters who are members of knitting groups or participate in online interaction with other knitters. Knitters do not *need* to come together to do their hobby suggesting that, when they do, they do so for social as well as technical reasons. This contrasts with activities where participants might be drawn together by specialist equipment such as the potter's kiln, a specific environment such as a dance studio, or by safety concerns, such as joggers out late at night. Knitting does share something with activities such as running in that some interviewees said they attended groups to maintain motivation, as a runner might. Particularly apparent in the interviews was that some women said that attending a knitting group was actually counterproductive when conversation distracted them from their work. Many were expansive about the personal benefits they received from their groups. The interviewees were all living in Edinburgh and a number were members of the same knitting groups or went to the same knitting shops. Others had less contact but were aware of these shops and groups through the internet. Kay described the knitting group she attended which, although covered a variety of types of people, was still a cohesive group,

I think it's unusual to get a mix of so many different people but all the personalities seem to get on really well but we're all different so I sort of liken it to a group of people where there's one or two people that you meet for the first time and think they're really, really nice, well the knitting group feels like it's made up of those two people from all the different groups that you'll meet...maybe it's something about brains that like knitting.

Not all interviewees felt part of the knitting community or identified with all aspects of it, as will be discussed later in the chapter. However the majority did identify with and value being one knitter amongst many. Gemma summarised this by saying '*it does feel like a tribe*', although she recognised not every knitter fitted into her definition of this tribe.

In addition to knitting groups, the knitters described a community that is local and international, online and offline. For example, beyond the local knitting groups that interviewees were part of, Fran had built an international community around her and her daughter. From her living room they hosted podcasts about knitting and interacted online with listeners. *Ravelry* is a hub for the internet knitting community and some of the knitters I spoke to communicated on forums there whereas other people took part to a lesser extent, such as taking part in a knit-along (where many people knit the same item at the same time and often post the results and help each other with difficulties), posting pictures of their finished projects, or reading the website without posting. Gail commented she felt through *Ravelry* women had defined a space of their own within what she felt was a largely masculine online world.

The knitters talked about a community which was largely non-competitive. They described their knitting groups as places where they felt comfortable asking for advice and enjoyed sharing ideas. Only Hazel hinted at competition saying '*I think that's why you take difficult projects because you can then show off*'. This was however, an anomaly in this set of interviewees. I gained a further insight into the relationships that surrounded knitting during a joint interview with two friends, Daisy and Eva, who did not attend knitting groups

but talked to each other in an interested, reflective and constructive manner during our conversation. After the interview I write in my notes:

in this interview they worked really well together. Sometimes Interviewee 27 [Daisy] would ask Interviewee 28 [Eva] questions herself and they reflected on the differences between them. It actually resulted in a very reflective conversation and I think they seemed to enjoy sharing stories...I have thought about why it seemed to work well and I think they both respected each other and each other's knitting.

Sophie was particularly articulate about the generosity of her knitting group. When talking about her knitting group's *Ravelry* forum she said

if you're having a down day you just flick through that and you sort of feed off other people's happiness and joy and you know that doesn't have to be something that's yarn related ... it can be all sorts of things ... there seems to be something about the type of people who come to the knitting group in that they are willing to take pleasure in other people's creations and willing to share what they've done and I think that helps in building friendships and building a sense of community.

In the knitting community I was struck by the openness to new members and the supportive atmosphere that knitting groups fostered. In these groups training seemed to be provided by peers on an equal footing. Stebbins (1992) suggests people who engage in serious leisure activities do so in a range of roles. One of these roles is as amateurs who are guided by the example set by their professional counterparts and who in return provide a knowledgeable audience for these professionals. However interviewees discussed members of their own communities as being influential rather than professional knitting designers. For example, there is a small network of women surrounding Elaine who runs a knitting group and has her own knitting shop. I asked Chloe if she felt like she was part of a community and she credited Elaine with fostering this,

it feels like there is [a community] here now actually and I think that is kind of thanks to [Elaine] she's one of those people who kind of attracts other people ... because she's so warm and inviting and now that she has the shop she has a lot of locals who come into the shop and she tells them about the knitting groups and they come along so it does feel like there is a community of knitters.

Although this section will discuss how the shared experience of knitting provides a sense of belonging, interviewees suggested diversity in other aspects was welcomed within the community. For example, Nancy felt more comfortable in her present group which was varied in terms of social class, rather than a group she had attended in the past which

tended to be...early twenties students and...[a] middle class type... [rather than her chosen group which] doesn't feel clique-y there's a slightly older group but there are people who I assume are undergrads [sic] there but generally speaking most of the people who I can think about tend to be working and just on the basis of people's accents I would say there's a broader range of class.

Debra said that although she did not currently attend a knitting group she would like to go to one which was diverse yet also had a number of professionals in it like herself. She was motivated to say this after having previously attended a group of retirees who had different approaches to knitting to her, for example they had less money to spend on yarn, and she felt uncomfortable knitting with expensive equipment in front of them. The potential discords within the knitting community that differences in spare time and spending power might create are discussed further in Section 8.4.

It seems therefore that knitting groups require some degree of identification between members in terms of outlook, but diversity is also welcomed. Finding or establishing a group which one feels they identify with can be seen as part of a process of establishing belonging both through finding shared experiences

but also distinguishing the group from those who are not members. Interviewees presented themselves as 'normal' within their groups and implied non-knitters would not understand their outlook. Meinhof and Galasinski (2005) position belonging as only achievable through defining who we are, but also who we are not, by 'othering' ourselves. This is possible even if group members are actually very diverse themselves, for example Whiting and Hannam (2014), studying an area of Newcastle which hosted alternative music events, described how people enjoyed going there so they could express themselves in dress or activity and feel 'normal' however much there was actually little unification between individual attendees. Here we can see Meinhof and Galasinski's (2005:8) 'discourse of (not) belonging' in that the interviewees sometimes established the cohesion of the group not by what characteristics knitters tended to have (after all they often struggled to explain why knitters tended to get on so well), but by establishing that non-knitters would simply not understand or appreciate the activity in the same way as other practitioners. To fit in, build relationships and know that the people around you are seeing you how you wish to be seen results in feelings of verification and wellbeing. Maslow (1970), in his much cited hierarchy of needs, places social desires including the experience of belongingness, below only our physiological and safety requirements. Pinker (2014: 381) suggests '[t]he evidence is pretty clear that we are wired for frequent and genuine social interaction. As humans we need to know that we belong'.

In four years of attending a knitting group Sophie said they had only had one person who had attended and who '*didn't gel with our group*'. This might indicate it tends to be more sociable people who attend knitting groups, or that new members look for a group which appears to be congruent with how they see themselves. Bourdieu (1986) uses the term 'habitus' to describe the process by which norms and values are perpetuated through repetition. For example, a specific attitude regarding what the colour blue represents is not a belief external to a culture, instead it relies on people repeating this belief for its survival. This process is often so embedded in daily life that some beliefs can seem set in stone despite their socially constructed nature. This is a useful

theory to apply to what people say about their knitting as it helps us understand the relationships between individual desires (such as liking the colour blue on boys or deliberately challenging convention by dressing a baby boy in pink) and societal structures (such as dominant beliefs and the sanctioning of those who contravene these beliefs). By finding a community whose habitus is congruent with our own we can experience belonging. Bourdieu (1986: 223) writes, 'agents only have to follow the learnings of their habitus in order to ... find an activity which is entirely 'them' and, with it, kindred spirits'. Likewise Meinhof and Galsinkski (2005:10) articulate belonging as achieved through aligning oneself with communities which have 'readymade templates into which locally negotiated identity can be placed'. For example, Yvonne had been a member of a knitting group whose ethos, influenced by 'Stitch n' Bitch', did not appeal to her. In contrast her current group shared her values and so, presumably, she felt comfortable perpetuating this habitus through her own participation, *'stitch n' bitch was quite an alienating idea ... [whereas] my knitting group ... we're all quite similar so queer or queer friendly, lefty, feministy'*.

Members of knitting groups can both shape its norms and values (in particular people like Elaine, and Fran who are influential in their communities), tend to look for those whose practices they identify with (for example, looking for a group where one feels 'normal'), and are also shaped by them (knitters who seem to have adopted group values are discussed in the next section). Hazel said she thought the activity of knitting had changed her personality and her value system, *'it has made me more patient and appreciative of craftsmanship'*. Elaine suggested certain people chose to knit, *'knitters are a special class of people [...] I think there are certain qualities that a person has to really appreciate or be a serious knitter and it just sort of draws you together I suppose'* and Yvonne chose a knitting group which was congruent with her political and sexual politics and family values. Sophie suggested some new members spent a while considering entry to the community by entering into online interaction with the group for several months before either attending or not, perhaps assessing their level of 'match' with the habitus of the group.

Identifying with members of their knitting communities might give knitters the confidence to articulate the counter-cultural elements of their hobby. Gonick (2004: 129) suggests that social differences conversely require sanction from other individuals in order to be socially acceptable,

the individual needs to establish a defensible difference between 'self' and the wider, social world. On the other hand, to be sustainable, such a difference requires social recognition and must be obtained in a form that also enjoys social approval.

Respondents placed value on doing an activity which resulted in unique products and that required skills other people did not have. Debra thought that it was this uniqueness and difference which actually served to bring members of the community together. It could be suggested that through this sanction from others, knitters were free to pursue their individualising hobby, which they seem to recognise as counter-cultural by using terminology such as 'obsession' and 'addiction'.

Although some men attended knitting groups along with the interviewees, they were always in a minority. Not all participants remarked upon this gender imbalance, however some valued the opportunity to build relationships with other women in particular. Green (1998:171) suggests we can view 'leisure as a site of identity construction and the re-working of personal relationships', and the interviews shed some light on women's friendships with each other, an area of research which seems at present underrepresented in the literature. Yvonne commented that knitting was a rare opportunity for her to talk just with other women,

I suppose it's my most feminine thing as well so I'm not particularly domestic or house-proud but knitting is something I quite like it being something I do with women I used to be conscious of why can't we just sit and talk why do we have to be doing something and now I can really see why.

Gemma said that because her knitting group had been all women they could identify with each other's experiences, *'it was a great sense of fellowship'*. Tessa attributed her attraction to a women-only environment to political motivations, *'I was doing a masters in women's studies kind of feminist theory so the idea of reclaiming women's handicrafts was quite, quite appealing'*.

The friendships that exist within groups, especially the relationship with a central important figure, might be expected as Stebbins (1990) suggests that people are more likely to engage in a serious leisure activity if they see someone involved who inspires them or if they already know someone who takes part. Kraus (2014), studying belly dancing as a serious leisure activity, found that people she spoke to similarly mentioned someone who had been influential in their starting or developing their leisure career – such as a friend or teacher. Similar to findings from this study she found that people were keen to pass on the skill and suggested friends join. It is worth considering that those who are more likely to take up knitting and join a group might be those who are already more inclined to be social and therefore define the community as welcoming and friendly.

Knitting was presented as a common ground, a bond, on which to form an initial relationship with new members. Knitting groups were portrayed as an accepting community where there were no hierarchies, *'there's a nice mix of people but we're all on a level because we're all here because we love knitting'* (Laura). Using Putnam's (2000: 23) term, knitting could be described as 'sociological WD-40' easing differences between members. Chloe reflected on the value of having something which presented an immediate bond between new and existing members,

if you're a bit kind of socially awkward which I am sometimes it's kind of nice because er there's automatically a topic everyone can talk about a topic and you don't have to think about how to make conversation with someone you don't know.

Sophie explicitly referred to switching to 'bonding' conversation with new members rather than the personal conversations she would normally have,

we go out of our way to talk about yarn things or crochet things with them so that they do feel included because it's an easy thing for them to talk about, maybe they might be in a personal situation where they can't all talk about their home life or whatever else so it's yeah it does make it much easier to join the group I think before I was [a member] I would find it very difficult to join other groups that I didn't have that common language.

She suggested that the shared language and terminology made it easier for new members rather than being exclusive because the terms were not mysterious and could be a 'way in'. During the interview many knitters mentioned the same designers (often local) and the same events and shops, often using shortened or first names. Sophie talked about this language,

there is a common language there but it's one that we are very willing to share ... there are some industries and some sorts of sciences that actually it's quite hard to penetrate because actually there's a lot of technical jargon and aside from specific knitting techniques I think a lot of the discussions are much more accessible you know so it might be easier for someone who is relatively new to the craft to come along.

Participants said that knitting groups were ideal for meeting new people, particularly in circumstances such as moving to a new city, as knitting offered a 'way in' to spending time with a group of women. When participants first joined their knitting groups, they remembered how they were less anxious when meeting new people because of having their knitting as a reason to be there and something to concentrate on. Participants said that new members could engage in conversation as much or little as they liked. Zoe had started a knitting group for service users at the charity she worked for to deliberately foster a friendly and inviting atmosphere and facilitate conversation. She

described how members could feel a sense of relaxation and achievement by learning to knit and how they were able to talk about personal issues,

because the people who come are on the whole quite angsty and we do 3 hours, we do 2 till 5 and it's quite a long time and people sustain the whole time in the group ... it's actually a really good environment to just create a space for people to talk and it's been, I think, therapeutically incredibly helpful for people and sometimes people have come in quite upset and we've said just knit a row and just see how you feel and you see people starting to change.

Zoe's primary reflection on the group was how it offered a relaxed space where members could talk about their lives or not, depending on what they wished, in a way that, had the conversation been forced and in a formal setting, or done without the 'excuse' or 'cover' of learning to knit, might not have taken place.

8.2.2 Knitting bonds out with knitting groups

This part of the section considers the bonds which exist between knitters and people outside of the knitting groups they may attend. These include the idea of other knitters from the past or fleeting interactions with members of the general public.

In addition to being part of knitting groups or participating in online communities, some knitters felt part of a wider group of women, looking to the past generally and to their own personal history for a sense of shared identity based on knitting. They interacted with the *idea* of other knitters, past, present and future. During the pilot interview and email questionnaire knitters often related their activity to women from the past, whether this was in general or in relation to their own family. Penny said knitting connected her to a general past and a personal one, *'I like ... the sense of historical continuity ... I'm involved in ancestor research, I'm interested in history you know'*. In this respect Penny experienced a sense of solidarity with other knitters despite only knitting alone.

Similarly, a questionnaire respondent wrote *'I like the idea of a long line of women stretching back in time having the ability to clothe their family and adorn their home using their own skill and creativity'* (Q2). Vicky related her knitting to family associations, saying she felt knitting was *'in the genes'*. She also expressed a wider sense of solidarity with women from the past and would enjoy inspiring other people to continue the skill,

I love to see pictures of old wifies [sic] spinning or knitting or things like that because you think well this is something that has been going on for centuries and you're just sort of well you are carrying the tradition forward as I say I haven't got a family but you know if I was sitting here one night and I was knitting something that was really gorgeous and a young person came and said to me, oh what is that, and if that person went away thinking I might have a wee look at that, I would think that was great.

Interviewees such as Penny and Vicky seemed to be accessing a collective remembering of women's experiences. This is not 'History', written by experts and including firm dates, places and events. Instead, the knitters seem to use their experience of knitting to imagine their idea of women's history and the history of knitting. Kuhn (2002) has explored the nature of personal and collective history as involving both memory and imagination and as playing an integral role in our conception of self. She suggests remembering can extend outwith of the individual's actual experiences, 'remembering appears to demand no necessary witness, makes no insistence on the presence of the rememberer at the original scene of the recollected event' (Kuhn, 2002: 128). Further research could explore further the ways in which we make the past real or imagine the past. Furthermore, this research raises a question for future exploration concerning the potential that our own past and a past which extends beyond our lifetime may both involve the same process of remembering.

Horsdal (2012:50) echoes Kuhn's (2002) ideas and suggests that through participating in 'narrative practices', telling stories, remembering events, thinking of the women who created the same patterns in the past, women can make links with their own history, acquiring the 'capability for mental time travel'. Through interacting with the narratives of knitters in the past the women feel part of something larger than themselves and a reassuring sense of continuity as their identities become intertwined with the collective and they feel those narratives are also their own, 'stories about ourselves or about somebody else appropriated as vicarious experience' (Horsdal, 2012:50). Similarly, but looking to the future, Fran remarked, '*I love that I get to share it with my daughter*'. These shared narratives, of knitting in the distant and recent past, and in the future serve to strengthen this community of women.

Sharing narratives builds communities. We create a common past through narratives and establish affiliations through our stories. Stories accomplish a sense of belonging to families, institutions, organisations, to physical or to imagined communities. Shared stories constitute a common fund of collective knowledge and memory. Narrative is the glue that makes us stick together, and join each other on our future journeys through the sharing of our dreams and plans (Horsdal, 2012: 67).

This discussion links with the notions of memory and identity in the previous chapter and begins to demonstrate the intertwining of real social interactions and interactions with ideas and stories which is developed in the next chapter. Knitters draw on this collective 'fund' of knowledge to articulate their group values, explored in the next section.

Some interviewees discussed enjoying feeling like they fitted in with the group, like what they were doing was '*normal*' (Nancy). They seemed to gain confidence from seeing other people who valued knitting in the same way they did, other '*likeminded people [who are] faintly obsessive*' (Amy). Rosie enjoyed the technical appreciation that socialising with other knitters offered, and also sharing things more widely,

there's something nice about knitting so you can actually share something with people it's not only that they appreciate it, it's that they like it as much as you do you know you can tell an unusual yarn ... it's really about sharing, the knitting group is about sharing things it's a really nice experience.

Almost all of the sample had been approached by interested strangers whilst they were knitting in public places. Here the act of knitting and the idea or memory of knitting act as a bridge between two complete strangers. Knitting in public creates, whether consciously or unconsciously, a certain identity in relation to those who are also sharing the bus, train or café with the knitter. Zoe, a vicar, commented that when knitting in public '*you make yourself a bit more soft*' meaning that you became approachable and unthreatening and maybe even inviting. Zoe said knitting had a similar effect to wearing her clerical collar as it seemed to make social interaction with strangers socially acceptable rather than inappropriate, as it would most of the time. Knitting in public can lead to social interactions which are potential sites of identification for both the knitter and the other person (who is sometimes also a knitter and sometimes not). These interactions can be spaces where the knitters articulate their knowledge, authenticity, counter-cultural values, or approachability. Other people may assist in this process by discussing childhood memories of knitting or exhibit surprise or admiration. Discussing an interaction with a podcast viewer Eva articulates a link between domestic space and the type of relationship knitting might foster despite the distance between them and the anonymity of the internet, '*I had a message just this week from someone and she said it feels like you're just sitting in my living room and I can just hand you a cup of tea*'. As proposed in Section 7.5, through knitting women interact with a system of ideas which includes notions of the knitters as an identity encompassing caring, productive and useful aspects. This may be the persona that people similarly associate with knitters when they see them in public.

The knitters I interviewed also talked about fostering relationships with non-knitters, and occasionally with other knitters, through the gifting of hand knitted objects. Gift giving of handmade items, and knitted items in particular, has been explored in detail elsewhere (see for example Johnson and Wilson, 2005 and Turney, 2012) in terms of objects as representing emotion and obligation and so will not be analysed in detail here. The notion that the women might feel obliged to produce gifts in their leisure time, or that they use this as a tactic of justification at taking leisure time, has been explored in the previous chapter. However, it is appropriate to also mention here as an additional example of how knitting (this time both the act of knitting and the knitted objects) can be seen as a bridge between people. The knitted object can contain within it the hours of preparation and production, becoming a 'real' gift. Gift giving is 'irrevocable and sociable' in that it creates relationships between people and ultimately an 'affective community' around the gift giver (Purbrick, 2014: 14). The giving of gifts relates to discussion of various forms of capital (see below) as within it a 'gift carries an economic and relational web' (Turtle, 2007: 312). Through gift giving, a knitter can foster her resources of social capital, can reinforce her cultural status as 'knitter' and as needed, as productive and as skilled. She also chooses to, as a 'craft consumer' (Campbell 2005), manipulate the products (equipment and materials) she has purchased into a form which has meaning and which challenges perceived notions of anonymous, meaningless, materialist consumerism. We should, however, be cautious about romanticising the idea of a handmade gift. As Eva and Daisy point out the gift can be as selfish an act as it is selfless. Mauss (2010 [1954]) influentially suggested that a gift exchange did not operate only in one direction or was not ever completely altruistic. Instead the gift receiver has an obligation to return something to the giver, whether this is something in the immediate term or a delayed obligation. Turney (2014) has applied similar notions of the 'binding' potential of hand knitted objects.

8.3 Social capital

This section uses Bourdieu's (1984) understanding of the term 'social capital', as meaning resources accumulated through relationships, to help understand what respondents said about their relationships with other knitters. Many of the interviewees talked expansively about the personal support they received from other knitters, referred to their knitting groups as respite from their day to day life, and said their knitting groups helped them through difficult times such as illness and stress. When Olive spoke about the topics of conversation that took place at her knitting group she included personal problems alongside technical support, *'we talk about everything and anything and maybe sometimes it's a case of someone is having a crisis, what's on the TV, yarn, not just the knitting'* (Olive).

Although wary of conflating online and offline social interactions, as Pinker (2014) is critical of researchers doing, there are parallels between the personal conversation that happens at knitting groups and the online knitting community. For example Fran, whose community was predominantly online, said that the people who regularly listened to her weekly knitting podcast knew about her and her family's personal life and would always ask how they were in correspondence. Most of the interviewees use the internet for help with difficult stitches, suggesting there are additional reasons to meet as a group other than technical advice. Elaine, who runs a local knitting group, commented *'if you meet another knitter you always have a friend'* (Elaine). Knitting has some historical association with women meeting together to make textiles and make conversation, and additionally it is an activity which is easily transportable and acceptable to be done in public space, might make it an ideal option for women looking to create a forum for women to socialise. In times of isolation, whether through personal events, or geographic or social mobility, knitting seems to offer an attractive opportunity to build a shared identity as modern women and receive the support to negotiate the demands of everyday life. This section explores these ideas in more detail.

Putnam (2000: 27) suggests that the number of community groups in America has declined over approximately the last 50 years, to the detriment of society and individuals. Although his theories regarding social capital have been derived from this American context, his ideas are useful in understanding what interviewees in this research say about their experiences of forming relationships through knitting. We can assume that some of the same influences that have caused a decline in meaningful social interactions in America, such as '[t]elevision, sprawl, and pressures of time and money' along with social and geographical mobility (Putnam, 2000:247) might have a similar role to play in British society. This had been the experience for some of the sample, many of which were not originally from Edinburgh and some of whom had moved from overseas. For example, Rosie said she joined a knitting group because

I didn't know many people in the city so I thought it would be a good idea...it's been really good and I don't know many people so it is trying to have conversations with different people even if they are not your friends you can chat with anyone.

Putnam suggests that meaningful social interactions are vital for individuals and society to prosper as communities that foster social capital encourage reciprocity and trust as people exchange various forms of capital, '[n]etworks of community engagement foster strong norms of reciprocity', trust and 'institutional effectiveness' to the benefit of all (Putnam, 2000: 20, 22). Meinhof and Galasinski (2005: 1) believe that social isolation presents a major problem 'in a world marked by socio-political upheavals and transnational motilities' where 'there are no easy answers and that our self-understanding of identity and belonging has come under stress'. Social interactions have both personal and collective benefits, as 'the social fabric of a community becomes more threadbare' then norms of reciprocity, generosity and trust become absent from the habitus (Putnam, 2000: 136). To combat this decline Putnam (2000) calls for 'social capitalists' to forge new communities. Knitters could be viewed as doing just this, addressing their need for meaningful social

interaction through knitting as an ideal leisure activity to be done in a group context.

Pinker (2014), writing from a background in social neuroscience, has studied the role social interactions play in our wellbeing. She suggests we have a 'biological drive' to seek out meaningful contact with other people which falls outside of reproductive motivations (Pinker, 2014: 14). She echoes Meinhof and Galasinski's (2005) concerns that more and more people say they are lonely, despite being more connected through the internet than ever before. She cites a survey by the UK Mental Health Foundation conducted in 2010 which found one third of those surveyed did not feel connected to their community suggesting Putnam (2000) might have produced similar findings had his study of community groups taken place in UK context. Pinker asserts that the benefits of social interaction are particularly evident in research which has looked at women. By collating various studies which have demonstrated the connection between improved mental and physical health and high quality social interactions, she attributes women's longer life expectancy to the greater value they tend to place on their relationships than men do.

[W]omen's social circles tend to be smaller, tighter, and more intimate than men's...Exchanging crucial bits of information within close female networks is key, I discovered. But a commitment to human contact for its own sake is also keeping women and their minds alive. Meeting in pairs or small groups, or simply talking on the phone, women pass on essential nuggets of information. They also get a neurochemical boost from the interaction (Pinker, 2014: 403).

Pinker (2014: 16) suggests that social interactions might have been overlooked in the past, 'I realised that pastimes we had long written off as frivolous time-wasters...serve important biological function' (Pinker, 2014: 16).

Bonds, built on commonalities, are suited to the exchange of information (Putnam, 2000). Coleman (1988: 104) explains how the acquisition of information requires an investment of time and attention, '[a]n important form

of social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations... But acquisition of information is costly. At a minimum it requires attention, which is always in scarce supply'. For example, Fran had built a resource of bonds with people around the world by investing considerable time in a weekly podcast and other activities.

We have over 400 active viewers that interact with us on a daily basis ... we do a photo chat ... we do a thing where we come up with a prompt for every day and then people take a photo and hashtag it and then we choose our favourites each week and so people love that, seeing their name or hearing their name on the show.

She could exercise her social capital and draw on these bonds to access technical advice,

I had a skein of yarn and I wanted to knit a cowl out of it but I didn't want to do the one that everybody else is doing ... I just popped on [to the internet] and posted it and within a couple of hours I had three suggestions for what I could do so it's very interactive.

In addition to technical support Sophie and Tessa enthusiastically discussed the benefits their knitting groups had provided in terms of supporting them through mental health issues. When I asked Sophie why she volunteered to participate in this research she replied that she wanted to tell other people who might need social support about the helpful relationships that knitting could help them access. For these knitters the friendships knitting had afforded them access to had moved beyond the bonds of technical support into a more generalised social capital and support network. We could view these friendships as bridges, a term Putnam (2000) uses to describe relationships which span social differences and go beyond the exchange of information. Putnam (2000) suggests that where bonds and bridges exist in a community social capital is fostered. This form of capital is built on trust and reciprocity as people exchange different forms of help. Pinker (2014:16) similarly asserts that

here is a 'restorative power of mutual trust derived from face-to-face contact with the people in your intimate circle'.

In the example above Fran could draw on specific reciprocity – she recommended patterns to her viewers and they recommended one in return. Even more desirable are communities where generalised reciprocity exists, something which Putnam (2000) suggests requires meaningful social interactions and bridges between people. Generalised reciprocity enables people to achieve things they wouldn't be able to do alone, and draw on their social capital no matter what arrives. In these communities 'mutual obligations' exist, rather than 'mere 'contacts'' (Putnam, 2000: 20). This type of relationship is exemplified in an interaction I observed during an interview conducted with Elaine, in the knitting shop she ran. I noted,

A customer came in and we broke off the interview for her [Elaine] to serve her. They were obviously very friendly, I think the customer had attended one of the knitting classes at the shop. The participant was really keen to see what the customer had made and the customer was proud. [Elaine] was excited about it and very congratulatory. She wanted to give the buttons for it for free. The customer obviously felt a loyalty to the shop I think and this little exchange showed what others have said about [Elaine] and her importance to [her knitting group].

The customer drew on her newly found network to ask Elaine for technical and aesthetic advice, accessing Elaine's human capital – the skills and knowledge she has developed through her experience of knitting (Coleman, 1988). Elaine also wanted to donate her physical capital – the buttons – to the customer without financial recompense. Other examples of generalised reciprocity in the findings include Amy who said her knitting group supported her when she experienced a difficult situation regarding where she was living, demonstrating Pinker's (2014:404) assertion that social interactions can make our lives run more smoothly, '[o]ur loads seem lighter, the hills literally less steep'. Values of generalised reciprocity echo the notion of producing and caring for others discussed in the previous chapter and may have physical and psychological

benefits as we become healthier and happier. Pinker (2014: 16) refers to this as the 'village effect' and suggests it 'not only helps you live longer, it makes you want to'.

Stebbins (1985) also suggests that serious leisure activities tend to have routines and rituals. Pinker (2014) argues that routine meetings, she uses the example of weekly religious gatherings but we could apply the same ideas to knitting groups, allow a degree of familiarity which enables people to know when someone needs help and an increased likelihood that they will offer it. Although Pinker (2014) does not specifically consider the social groups that surround leisure activities, she considers the importance of face to face contact and undertaking the same activity at the same time, as in a knitting group. She suggests 'doing things together in the same room makes us feel like we're being watched over and looked after and induces a sense of mutual trust' (Pinker, 2014: 109).

There are, however, opportunities for some degree of social capital and reciprocity to be developed within online communities as knitters exchange help and advice regarding patterns and equipment. Knitters who design patterns can draw on social capital to publicise and test patterns, often facilitated through *Ravelry* where users can post pictures and reviews and identify problems or questions about patterns. Stebbins (1992) suggests that in serious leisure activities, amateurs provide a knowledgeable audience for professionals to receive feedback from and a market for their products. The community of amateur knitters provides knowledgeable testers for the professionals, whether these are completely professional or standing in as professional in this specific relationship. There is an informal system of feedback from a knowledgeable audience as makers can instantaneously correspond with designers and a community of fellow makers should issues arise with a pattern. Knitters could be seen as subversively adapting the potential of the internet, which could be associated with anonymity and low quality social interaction, to create ways for people around the world to interact in ways which have some meaning.

Connolly (2002) suggests that a deliberate formation of community within leisure time, such as knitters could be seen as having undertaken, is particular to women. He suggests men tend to create communities based on convenience, such as geographic proximity, and are less likely to define leisure by the relationships involved in the activity. In Kraus' (2014) recent study of women's engagement in serious leisure she similarly found women deliberately sought a leisure activity based on the potential it offered them to meet other women and situate themselves in a community they identified with. The knitters in this study frequently spoke about rewarding, supportive relationships with other women, relationships that we could see as echoes of knitting as an emblem of female solidarity in textile production in a real or imagined past. Elaine made this link, saying that she thought knitting groups and virtual communities were a way that women could regain a traditional support network. Elaine suggested that in the past women could have learnt a range of skills from older members of their community and, should they need further support throughout their life, they would remain surrounded by the community in which they grew up in. There is a kind of collective folk memory of knitting and spinning as activities which historically women did together in groups. As discussed above, women could be seen as successfully finding a way to create similar support networks through knitting groups. The value the interviewees placed on the social interactions facilitated by their knitting suggests they may be distinctive against the background of their everyday lives, and potentially more valuable because of it. In other words, they had sought out their own 'village', to use Pinker's term (2014).

8.4 Community values

This section builds on the idea of a knitting community to look at what values and attitudes seem to prevail amongst knitters. Participants expressed a preference for natural over synthetic fibres and attached moral value to hand production of objects. This section uses the term 'authenticity' to interpret this

pattern and uses Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus and Campbell's (2005) understanding of the social class based aspects of 'craft consumers' to discuss what may be happening.

There was a common ethos amongst most, although not all, interviewees in terms of the yarns they knit with and the places they bought them. For the purposes of this discussion this ethos will be referred to as a search for 'authenticity' to reflect the way this seemed to be portrayed as the correct and desirable option with a historical precedent by some participants. For example, Penny said *'I never knit with synthetic materials if anything has acrylic in it I throw it away'*, and said this attitude had been passed to her from her mother who *'instilled in me this total suspicion of any non-natural and synthetic materials'*. Penny also believed *'we should support sheep farmers, we are a sheepy country and I think wool is expensive it's sort of in the luxury category and it shouldn't be'*. Whilst this attitude could stem from political and environmental motivations, this link was rarely made explicitly in the interviews and seemed instead to be taken for granted, part of being a 'proper' knitter. It should be noted that there may be some practical as well as ideological reasons for choosing natural fibres, for example, Elaine linked knitting with natural yarn to being in Scotland rather than her home country of America as there is a particular history of wool use here, and Zoe suggested practical reasons to choose natural fibres *'I do think it's the feel of the wool so I know that if I've knitted with something very synthetic which I would never do I just hate it actually I really don't like it I don't like knitting with it'*. Having said this, I suggest it is possible to find acrylic fibres which are as soft as natural ones. Gemma distinguished between what was in her opinion good and bad taste in knitting, including an assessment of acrylic yarn *'I see people knit really, really sort of kitsch tacky stuff and I just think you are not of my tribe ... really awful acrylic furry jumpers'*. Additionally, there was also a common attitude that hand knitted objects were more meaningful than mass-produced items.

These attitudes could be viewed as being passed between members of the knitting community through the collective remembering discussed above and

in the previous chapter and perpetuated through the habitus of the local community (Bourdieu, 1984). Aside from practical motivations, one way to understand the favouring of materials and values deemed more 'authentic' is to apply Campbell's (2005) concept of 'craft consumers'. Campbell (2005) suggests that amongst the middle classes there is the belief that craft is a form of labour which is ennobling and a route to true self-expression. Whilst Campbell is primarily concerned with the alteration of mass produced items, such as distressing furniture or decorating store bought clothing, some of his ideas are relevant to the value system articulated by the knitters. Participants value the opportunity to make something from scratch themselves (albeit using yarn and a pattern purchased from a producer), and place a value on handmade items and suggest this is a way to improve oneself (see discussion of the moral value placed on avoiding idleness in Section 7.5). This echoes Campbell's (2005: 23) assertion that craft consumers implicitly contrast 'inalienable, humane, authentic and creative work' with 'mechanical, unfulfilling and alienating labour'. These notions develop some of the discussion in the previous chapter which contrasts the autonomy and flow experienced through knitting with other aspects of daily (often paid) work (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Favouring natural yarns and small-scale producers, as most interviewees seem to do, can be interpreted using Bourdieu's (1984) concept of purity. He suggests that the values of a community are made manifest in the materials which are deemed 'pure', a form of social approval, by the group. He speaks almost of a fetishisation of the natural and authentic and relates these ideas to knitting and natural fibres,

[t]he true nature of this counter-culture, which in fact reactivates all the traditions of the typically cultivated cults of the natural, the pure and the authentic, is more clearly revealed in the equipment...authentic Jacquard sweaters in real Shetland wool, genuine pullovers in pure natural wool...Norwegian woollen caps.

Bourdieu suggests here that the articulation of the distinction, between those who are and are not within the community, is not only the ability to knit, but the

values exerted through the choice of equipment and patterns. These require a degree of culturally specific knowledge, i.e. cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Campbell (2005) develops these notions to further consider how craft consumers with cultural capital are more equipped to both articulate the values valorised within the dominant discourse, and also have an increased concern for the alienating potential of mass produced objects. According to Campbell, craft consumption bears the rarefication of materials of fashion and Fine Art on one hand, and the tacit knowledge and functionality of craft on the other. Those who have the cultural capital both to recognise their desire for an alternative to mass production and to articulate their counter cultural values are also able to verbalise their experiences, according to Bourdieu.

The community of knitters might not be accessible to everyone. Putnam (2000) cautions against always assuming a strong social network, with resources of social capital, must have only positive repercussions. As physical and human capital can be directed negatively, so can social capital. Although this section is not suggested that knitters themselves are deliberately mobilising their social resources to exclude others, this may be an unintended consequence based on economic and cultural practicalities which serve to bar entry to some. Roberts (2004: 67) suggests that all leisure activities require the exchanging of 'economic, social and cultural assets (or capitals)'. If this is the case, then perhaps they necessarily exclude those who do not have the necessary assets.

Roberts (2004), in an assessment of inequalities in leisure time and activities, suggests that middle classes do not tend to have more time for leisure than the working classes. However, the nature of their activities differ as they, because of childhood socialisation and economic advantages, are more likely to take part in organised and serious leisure activities than those who are less affluent. Although Roberts' proposition is not universal, for example potentially in the case of amateur football leagues, it remains useful to reflect on the exclusiveness of the knitting community. This might suggest that knitting requires some cultural as well as economic capital in order to set aside the

time and finances required. Deem (1996) suggests that women in higher paid work are more likely to see themselves as deserving distinct leisure time set aside from other responsibilities or taking place outside the home. Although written nearly twenty years ago, it is an interesting finding to consider in the light of knitting given that the activity spans both these spaces, able to be viewed as distinct 'me time', taking place in cafés and bars, or as fitting in around the responsibilities of the domestic sphere.

As mentioned above, the interviewees had enough money to be able to buy some yarn and often knit in natural fibres which can be more expensive. Many worked at universities (probably because of the word of mouth recruiting that went on between interviewees) and a couple held or hold important positions in the Scottish Government and the National Health Service. The interviewee who used to work for the National Health Service did not have time to knit whilst she was working and it is only upon retirement that she has made time to knit and weave. Contrastingly, the civil servant spent a lot of time sewing and knitting, and had done so throughout her working life and whilst also bringing up her children. We might have assumed that knitting would be more important to those people who had more spare time to engage in leisure. However, whilst some of the group conformed to this viewpoint, often those in retirement, this was not the case with other knitters who had to balance many aspects of their lives in order to fit in time to knit. Respondents often originally heard about the knitting groups they attend through *Ravelry* or through conversations with those working in local shops. Both finding out about knitting groups and attending them requires spare time. It might be assumed that those interviewees who seemed to have the most demanding jobs might have less time for, for example, shopping for yarn. However, the interviewee who seemed to be in the most demanding job also spoke most carefully about her shopping habits, such as choosing to visit farms so she could see the sheep that her yarn came from. This seems to indicate it is possible to make time for knitting that may not at first seem 'spare'. On the other hand, making time for oneself, something that, as discussed in relation to productivity and serious leisure in the previous chapter, might not readily mesh with societal

conceptions of femininity, might be more easily challenged by those already in a powerful position in other areas of their lives. We must additionally bear in mind that through advertising in knitting shops it may be that only those who could afford to shop locally were present in the sample.

The most explicit comment from participants regarding the economics of knitting came from Zoe noting that she was only able to make knitting available to the service users of her charity, who tended to be unemployed, because the charity subsidised the activity,

there's a sort of socioeconomic thing because I think there was a time when knitting was something that people did because they couldn't afford to buy a sweater whereas knitting a sweater almost always costs more than buying one now and some patterns and wool are hugely expensive ... I think most of the people who come to my knitting group wouldn't knit as much as they do if we were not giving them a bit of financial support because yeah you can't knit a garment for less than £50 ... I mean, yes of course you can knit a garment for less than that but it's not going to feel nice to knit it's not going to be a pleasure so I guess then it's back to the more utilitarian view of knitting as opposed to the kind of, I don't know, therapeutic sense of it that I would say has been my experience.

Like Zoe, Wendy connected income and type of yarn used and compared her experience in a knitting group in Edinburgh with a knitting group she used to attend in America,

I know more people here that are actually working with wool rather than acrylic but that might just be because of the types of people ... maybe the groups I'm working with here are ... different socioeconomics I don't know or just being in a city I mean I was in a city there too but it was a smaller city and maybe not as, I feel like some of the people there that I was knitting with were more in different socioeconomic groups and were just using acrylic.

Wills (2007) found most of the American knitters she came across were educated to at least undergraduate level and many were middle or upper class, although the complexity of defining these terms was not discussed. Similarly, Springgay et al. (2011) observe that amongst the University students they regularly come into contact with, knitting tends to be a hobby only of white middle class young women. This suggests further research may be needed in the future to investigate equality of access to particular leisure activities.

Summary

This chapter has examined the social interactions between knitters and between knitters and people who do not knit. It has suggested that through sharing knitting women invest time and attention in each other and can gather reserves of social capital. Through bonds based on similarities and bridges spanning differences, social capital can be fostered and then exercised to receive specific reciprocity in the form of technical help. Additionally, and importantly, the community may be strengthened through an ethos of generalised reciprocity where knitters receive personal support and advice which is unrelated to knitting.

There is no need to come together to knit, although some techniques may be more easily learnt from a more experienced knitter. As knitters often value the process of knitting over the end product, so the social aspects of knitting often overtake technical support as a motivation to attend a knitting group. It seems to be important to many knitters to spend time with other likeminded women and feel they fit in and belong. Knitting is suited for adoption by social capitalists, seeking the relationships and community that they feel is needed in their lives, as it is transportable and unobtrusive in public locations to meet with other people, and can be done whilst conversation is taking place as it is not messy, loud or requiring constant attention. Knitters interact with other people directly, for example through knitting groups or online, or indirectly,

through the idea of women who knitted in the past or by browsing the internet and viewing other knitter's creations.

This process of belonging and sharing is both concerned with the present but also with the past and future when knitters feel connected with women in the past and seek to pass on the skill to future generations. In this respect knitting provides a sense of long term continuity extending outside of the knitter's lifetime, in addition to the short and medium sense of continuity discussed in the previous two chapters. By experiencing this support and belonging the women can then 'stand out' from non-knitters due to the knowledge that there is a community which approves of their activity and outlook. This community is held together by certain norms and values which increase cohesion and group identity. Knitters, in the geographic region of this study, tend to place value on 'authenticity' manifested in natural fibres, local producers, and hand making over mass production. Perhaps inevitably these collective values serve to exclude some for whom they are inaccessible whether through lack of economic or cultural capital. It seems vital that future research investigates those women who are excluded from leisure activities such as this and who may not therefore be accessing the benefits that the women interviewed here find so important.

This chapter supports Jenkins' (2004) conception of identity as articulated and created through social interaction as participants felt a strong sense of group identity and adopted similar values to fellow members. Knitters also suggested that social interactions reinforced their resilience and individual sense of self through the support they received. The notion that there is a certain ethos amongst the community suggests that the group might also shape an individual's identity as they are integrated into the community.

Chapter 9 Knitting, identity and interactions: Casting off

Introduction

The knitter ‘casts off’ the final stitches of their project, looping them together in groups in order to prevent the knitting unravelling. Likewise, this chapter brings together the strands which have run through the thesis to consider how they relate to each other and form a cohesive whole. This has two aims. Firstly, it highlights and reflects upon the core theoretical propositions generated by the research. Secondly, it distils the whole project to give the reader a sense of how the different parts fit together, from research aims to design to findings. The first half of the chapter recaps the research aims and the key ways the research makes a contribution to the existing knowledge base. In the second half the experience of conducting the research and the strengths and limitations of its design are reflected upon and theoretical propositions are drawn from the three core themes that were identified through analysing the data.

The thesis has argued that knitted objects represent more to the knitter and those around them than the sum of its parts. Similarly, this chapter explores how, by looking at key themes in conjunction rather than in isolation our understanding is developed. Therefore discussion of these themes is included in this chapter in addition to the individual analysis chapters. Analysis identified three core themes which were characterised as ‘creativity’, ‘productivity’ and ‘social interaction’. The findings suggest that creativity and social interaction are important for our wellbeing and that leisure time is a potential site for experiencing them. This chapter will consider how these might not only tell us about the role that knitting plays in women’s lives but about their sense of self more widely.

9.2 Women's identities and hand knitting: Recapping the research aims

This section recaps the research aims and how they were investigated in order to provide a background for the subsequent sections and to remind the reader what the research set out to achieve. The research had a core theoretical aim, and two lower level aims. These themes were addressed in reverse in the thesis, building from micro level to wider meta level propositions. Addressing the third aim – to conduct an empirical study of the lived experience of women hand knitters – resulted in the micro level findings reported in Chapter 5. The second aim – to understand the role hand knitting plays in their lives – exists on a macro level and was addressed in the analyses in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. Finally, the three themes which were identified through analysis are considered in combination to result in conceptual propositions on a meta level which looks to propose a theoretical understanding of how women create and communicate their identities, the first, and major, research aim. These propositions are introduced in the analysis chapters, but are articulated more explicitly here. Figure 12, below, illustrates how the three aims build on each other, from micro to meta level.

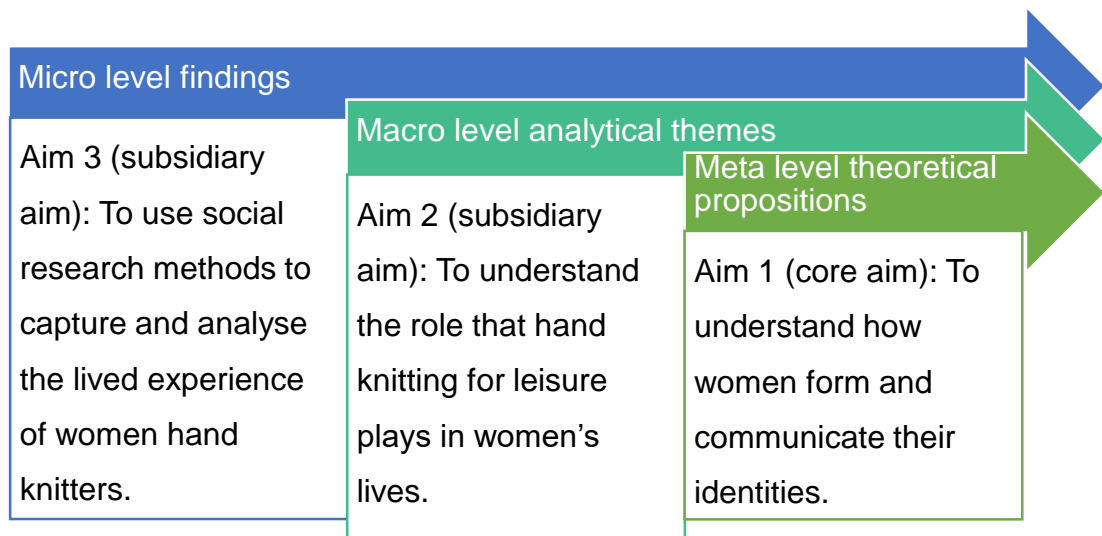


Figure 12: Micro, macro and meta level conclusions

The research question was arrived at through a process of focusing my interests as I became more familiar with the research area. Leisure time was chosen as the focus of this research as it is posited to be a period of our lives where we have more choice regarding how we spend our time. By studying it I hoped to access rich information on how people create their identities.

Knitting was chosen as a leisure activity to study for three key reasons:

1. In the past knitting was largely, although not exclusively, done out of necessity. We no longer need to be able to knit to clothe ourselves and there are more accessible ways to entertain ourselves, with television and the internet providing ways to fill our spare time and relax. Seemingly at odds with some elements of contemporary life, hand knitting is a slow and expensive way of acquiring knitted goods and contrasts with the immediate gratification and materialism we could see as characterising our consumer lives within a capitalist system. The research confirmed my proposition that knitting must therefore play an

important role in women's lives in order that they devote their leisure time to it when they do not have to.

2. I am a knitter and I hoped this personal investment would bring a driving force and a nuanced understanding to the research. I have reflected in Sections 3.7 and 3.10 that taking the position of an insider helped in making contact with participants, developing rapport and understanding their responses. However, I recognise this position may also lead to taking the same things for granted as participants and therefore used grounded theory to thoroughly examine my own response to participant's comments (Charmaz, 2006).
3. In Europe and North America there is an historical connection between women, their femininity, and making textiles (Wayland Barber, 1996; Goggin, 2002; Parker, 2010 [1984]). I was interested in how this connection might continue or be adapted to those contemporary contexts where knitting is no longer a necessity. Knitting, as a craft and as women's domestic work, traditionally has a low cultural value in comparison to weaving, as a professionalised craft, or fine art for example. This history provides a juxtaposition with knitting today which can be a luxury hobby, with silk yarns and trendy shops which again suggested that knitting would be an interesting focus for study. Furthermore, the historical association with femininity made it potentially a suitable focus for a contemporary study concerned with women's identities.

9.3 Making a contribution to knowledge

This section examines the key contributions this research makes to our present understanding of hand knitting, women's leisure activities, and women's identities. I have argued that, if we consider identity as constructed through interactions and as subject to both societal expectations and individual desires (Jenkins, 2004) then knitting is arguably an ideal focus for a study of

identity. This is because it is an activity which happens both individually and in group contexts, in private and in public, and as a craft and leisure activity. This section follows on from the rationale for undertaking the research presented in the introductory chapter, the assessment of existing knowledge (Section 2.4) and the comments on methodological trends (for example a low number of empirical studies) in existing literature (Section 2.3.5) by reflecting on what the research has added to our current understanding. The contribution this research makes is based on three key areas; firstly illuminating a less researched area of study, secondly applying new approaches to existing areas of study in order to examine what this revealed, thirdly developing different applications of existing concepts and determining the relationships between these concepts.

Contribution 1: To illuminate particular elements of contemporary hand knitting and women's experiences that the review of the literature (Chapter 2) suggested to be obscure or less researched. This contribution is based on a sample of knitters, type of leisure activity and focus on the familiar and everyday.

There seems a consensus in the literature that knitting is important to knitter's identities and wider research supports this by finding that making objects can be a process of creating and communicating identity (Miller, 2010). However, although knitting has received increased academic and media attention in recent years, there is the potential that our understanding remains only partial. Existing research tends to focus on knitted items as they appear in craftivism (for example Chansky, 2010; Williams, 2011), industry and fashion (Black, 2005; 2009) or in artworks (Maharajat, 2001; Nelson, et al., 2009). The process of knitting has been studied as a therapeutic (Corkhill, 2014; Gant, 2015), political (Myzelev, 2009) or social activity (Prigoda and McKenzie, 2007; Wills, 2007; Fields, 2014). My research contributes to our current

knowledge by taking an alternative perspective which focused on knitters who could be termed 'normal' in that they were not necessarily engaging in the above contexts, and secondly by looking at what they experience was of both knitting alone and in groups.

This research also contributes to our existing knowledge by studying a leisure activity traditionally deemed 'feminine' and, according to Stalp (2015), frequently overlooked by sociological study because of this association. It is important to study this area to challenge any assumptions that people may have about what is and is not of academic interest and who can or cannot make analytically rich reports of their daily experience. We must study activities such as knitting to shed light on how some people form their identities, relate to others and achieve what they need in life.

More overt forms of knitting in activist, artistic and political contexts might at first seem the more likely types of knitting to interact with important questions of identity, norms and values. However, this thesis has found that knitting as a leisure activity can similarly be viewed as interacting with the significant questions in our lives such as who we want to be and how we want to interact with others. It may be easy to dismiss knitting as a fad when associated with political movements or fashion trends. It may seem obvious that knitting groups offer women social interaction, or that knitting provides a sense of satisfaction and pride. It remains that researching these areas can be beneficial in exploring, understanding, corroborating and refuting these ideas.

It has arguably long been accepted in sociology and anthropology that the familiar and taken-for-granted, and the areas of our lives that traditionally would not be associated

with academic or scientific enquiry, are valuable sites for study, particularly for the way they shed light on the norms and values at the core of our daily lives, for example Goffman (1956) . My research has been useful in reminding us of this by demonstrating the value of turning academic attention towards a type of leisure activity, and form of knitting, that might have been previously seen as lacking in critical or analytical potential.

By looking at this under-researched focus and sample, the research has shed light on how women's hand knitting as a leisure activity is about the *process* of knitting far more than the knitted items that are produced. This illustrates the importance of fit between research topic and methods (Richards, 2005). For example if I had been studying yarn-bombing or knitted artworks it would have been necessary to use approaches which took into account the final form of the knitting. This is not to imply that had I turned my attention to the final knitted items insights would not have been generated. Rather, by asking knitters to narrate their experience of knitting new insights were generated and taken-for-granted hunches were explored resulting in a more complex and deeper understanding.

Contribution 2: To use an under-utilised approach in the area of textile scholarship to examine what this approach could reveal. This is not to suggest empirical approaches are absent from the study of textiles or material culture more widely. Instead it is suggested that the research design used here, influenced by grounded theory and social research, is less common in textiles research than other methods.

By applying a new approach to an existing area of research I have argued that social research and empirical methods are

sympathetic to the nuanced meanings of textiles and the intuitive hunches of the researcher. Using a qualitative social research approach has encouraged me to aim to explore the lived experience of knitters. Through reviewing the literature I concluded that within textile research, writers tended to use other cultural artefacts, such as literary works, as mediators or lenses through which to discuss or view textiles (for example Dunseath, 1998; Breward, 1999). Textiles, especially clothing, have also been studied as artefacts themselves (for example, Stallybrass, 1993; Friese, 2001; Banin and Guy, 2001; Weber and Mitchell, 2004; Heti et al., 2014), and in historical contexts (for example Goggin, 2002; 2009; Hamlyn, 2012). As Chapter 2 discussed, writing specifically concerning knitting often uses metaphor and takes a discussion piece form to explore the meaning of contemporary knitting (for example, Thakkar, 2008; Busch, 2013). Research that does employ a more empirical approach, such as Fields (2014), often relies on participant or non-participant observation. These trends within the discipline have the potential to leave our understanding only partial. My research contributes to our understanding by broadening to consider the experiences of knitters using their own words as the basis of the research.

This research took a systematic and empirical approach, borrowing grounded theory methods from social research and choosing interviews rather than observation. The strengths grounded theory brought to the research such as negotiating the proliferation of stereotypes existing in the area and looking closely at the taken-for-granted, have been set out in Chapter 3.

The term 'empirical' might to some conjure images of the artificial and clinical conditions of the laboratory or demands

of representativeness and generalisation which are arguably at odds with detailed and reflective studies of lived experience. Others may assume qualitative analysis software such as QSR*NVivo, used in this research, acts as a barrier between the researcher and their data, reducing the complexity of individual experience to rules and distinct categories with little room for ambiguity and multiple meanings. I suggest that this is not the case. Following a systematic content analysis procedure and using software to organise data has facilitated rather than prevented changes in direction in response to my evolving understanding rather than providing a fixed route without flexibility (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2012). Pursuing hunches has been made possible through keeping a reflective journal and being able to manipulate the data easily, with little investment of time, and with little risk as there is the option of returning to previous arrangements and labelling when using such software.

It has been acknowledged in Chapter 3 that there is the potential that content analysis results in losses as the data is reduced from its original complexity to fewer and fewer categories. This is perhaps an inevitability of research which seeks to form an understanding which is useful and practical. This research has therefore been framed in the context of myself as the researcher and the particular sample and the potential that other researchers would see additional themes in the data is recognised.

Contribution 3: To firstly develop different applications of existing concepts and to secondly determine the relationship between existing concepts. The third contribution exists on more conceptual level than the first two. This contribution has two parts which are closely related and therefore are discussed together.

Within the analysis, key concepts from existing literature were used to help understand the themes identified in the findings and build a theoretical framework. This understanding exists on two levels, firstly applied to knitting and secondly moving up an analytical level to apply to how women create and communicate their identities. This framework uses the idea that the process of knitting is more meaningful than the final knitted items and that knitting provides short and long term continuity to link established concepts such as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002 [1992]; 2014), serious leisure (Stebbins, 1985; 1992), the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), and social capital (Putnam, 2000). This research is useful in furthering our understanding of the role that creativity and skill play in our leisure time and the way we create and communicate our identities and building on and broadening Jenkins' (2004) conception of social identity. This research has suggested the potential utility of applying existing research spanning over thirty years and several disciplines in understanding topics of current interest from small to larger scale including knitting, textiles, creativity, gender and social inclusion. However, it has also been argued that concepts such as these should only be introduced after analysis in order that the data is not manipulated to fit into pre-conceived ideas (Charmaz, 2006).

The research has demonstrated that studying something familiar and apparently low-impact, taking place in homes and local cafes, can shed light on 'big' issues in our lives. As researchers we should borrow and lend approaches across disciplines and seek to develop the areas that may at present be overlooked or under-studied. Furthermore, through establishing new ways to involve research participants in research and break down barriers between the researcher and the researched we can potentially generate increasingly reflective and valid accounts of lived experience.

9.4 Theory grounded in data: reflections on the research design and execution

This section reflects on the research design and approach to consider how my previous experience and the decisions I took during the research affected the outcomes. The section covers three key issues which are discussed in turn:

1. The evolution of my research interest as I strove to get closer to the lived experience of making and using textiles, and the impact this had on the appropriate methodology to use.
2. Theory and lived experience in textile scholarship.
3. The relationship between the researcher, the researched and the research questions.

This section suggests that grounded theory and the study of lived experience (belonging both to oneself and the participants) has been a rewarding process and ideal in the context of knitting as an area which contains stereotypes and assumptions to be navigated. It is argued here that this research should be viewed, as Charmaz (2006) advocates, as existing within a continuum, building on what has gone before, and sparking further thematic and methodological ideas to be explored in the future.

9.4.1 Getting closer to lived experience: Reflecting on research interests

I have reflected on my research interests over the course of undergraduate and postgraduate study. I think it is relevant to include some of this reflection here as it places my doctoral research in context and will provide the reader with an insight into what I have aimed to achieve with this research and also the direction in which I am moving as a researcher. This discussion is appropriate here, rather than earlier in the thesis, as it contains insights only

made possible with the benefit of hindsight. My doctoral research can be positioned within a research journey where my continuing interest in women's identities and textiles has developed from an approach which looked for understanding generated by viewing lived experience through the lens of cultural products. This position has progressed to striving to move aside this lens and get closer to the lived experience of the people I have studied. This evolution is illustrated in Figure 13 below.

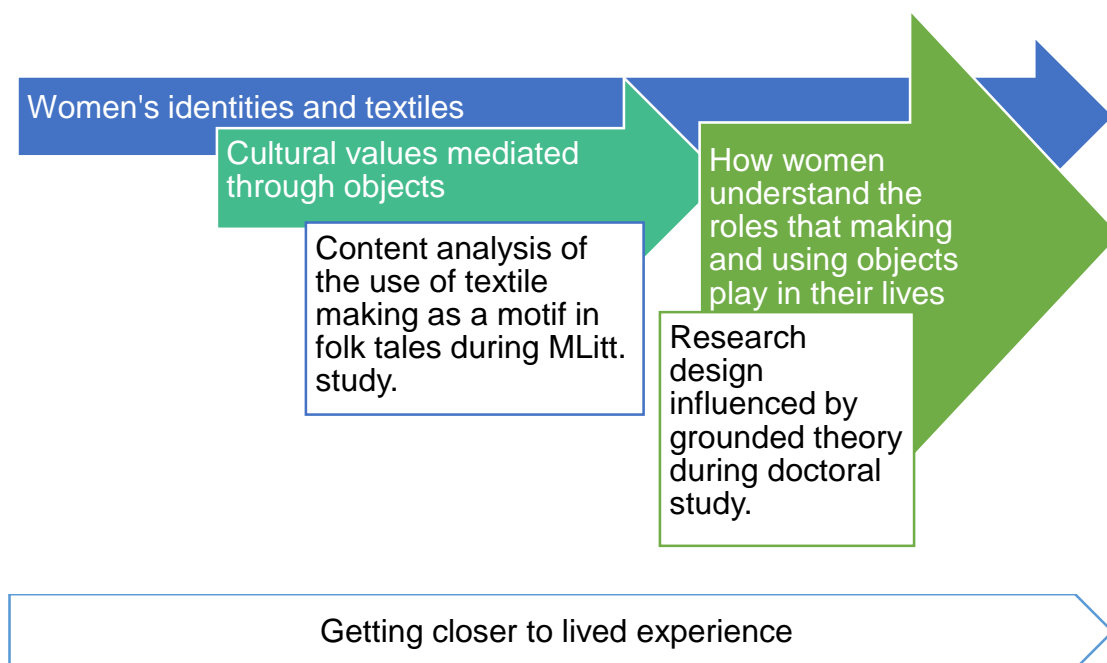


Figure 13: Focusing on lived experience, research interests and methodologies

During study for an MLitt. I had already moved from studying textile objects themselves to studying their appearance in other contexts as a way to study what they meant as cultural artefacts. For example I researched how women making textiles were portrayed in folk tales. Although it seemed a subtle shift at the time, from looking at real objects to looking at their fictional representations, this was an important experience as I realised my interest lay not only in the material and aesthetic qualities of textiles but even more so in the stories they could tell about women's experiences. I had begun to crystallise this interest in notes written in preparation for my first supervisory meeting in October 2012. I wrote, '*textiles are an ideal focus for my research,*

as they tell personal and intimate stories, national and international stories, economic, social and cultural histories'. As I began reading around the subject my thinking evolved further to question what type of research I wanted to produce and how I would best find out about my research interests, '[d]o I want to interpret textiles to tell stories, or access the stories direct from people?', I wrote a few months into the doctorate in December 2012, marking the point at which I took a step closer to lived experience by removing the lens of other cultural artefacts.

Influential in my decision to use data gathered directly from participants was an experiment I conducted over Christmas 2012. I wanted to know what it was like to interview someone and for my first interviewee chose my grandma who was likely to be patient with me and whom I was comfortable and at ease with. In between our customary games of *Scrabble* at her kitchen table I asked my grandma to tell me about a dress originally belonging to her which she had handed down to me. This was my first experience as an 'Interviewer' and I discovered the excitement of constructing new understandings together as I delved into my family history and my grandmother's life before I knew her. Although familiar to me it also seemed exotic in the same way I had felt when, in the previous year, I had handled and studied and asked questions of a Victorian nursing dress. Not only did I want to continue to discover what I could learn about women's lives by looking at textiles, but it was after interviewing my grandma that I became determined to talk to women themselves and, furthermore, that I wanted to uncover things about myself and my own place in the world as a social being.

The developments in my research interests were also reflected in the methodologies I considered using. My original proposal for the doctorate aimed to explore textiles as both conforming to and subverting dominant notions of femininity. However, as I became more interested in the idea of seeking people's own experiences of making textiles (rather than how other people portrayed them) so I also moved away from wanting to apply pre-conceived ideas to the data I was intending to collect. This also coincided with

the observation that in the existing literature there was less attention paid to the experiences of women who were not necessarily politically or artistically motivated and that textile scholarship had largely not yet engaged in empirical research. At the time these decisions felt unrelated but in hindsight they form a pattern of wanting to get closer to the lived experience of the people I wanted to study.

This research has taught me some of the exciting and insightful conclusions that can be gained through researching in the real world, so to speak. This thesis may be static but the research it represents is not. The research not only raises issues for further study but also represents a point on my own journey as a researcher and as an individual. It has pointed me in the direction of participatory methodologies which seek to erode boundaries between the academic and the people they study, a path which I am eager to now take. For example, I recently trialled some of these ideas by running a public event which invited informal conversation between participants and myself, and asked them to contribute their thoughts.

9.4.2 Textiles and lived experience: Reflecting on the research approach

Grounded theory offered an ideal approach to structure this process of building practical and useful conclusions on the data collected (Charmaz, 2006). It should be noted that this research did not follow a pure grounded theory methodology as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1967]). Instead the research took influence from Charmaz's (2006) version of grounded theory which deviates with regards to issues such as the viability of asking the researcher to approach the data with a completely fresh perspective as has been discussed in Section 3.3.2. This research sought to address the observed tendency in the existing literature in this area to firstly study textiles in the context of other cultural products and secondly to over-theorise. These

methodological tendencies potentially left our understanding of the contemporary significance of textiles only partial and was addressed by conducting close, empirical research with a 'methodological fit' between research aims and methods (Richards, 2005). The decision to base the research on grounded theory was motivated by the aim to unite the theory and the practice of living everyday life. By talking to women who knit and, as much as was possible, letting their words shape the research direction and analysis the goal was to only then form a conceptual framework which would follow the contours of the data rather than having shaped observations to fit a predetermined theory. This approach was beneficial given the number of stereotypes associated with knitting.

This research is useful in that it looks in close detail at some aspects of contemporary knitting and takes a systematic and empirical research approach. It is arguable that textiles, and perhaps fashion especially, have in the past been dismissed by researchers as frivolous and without meaning, as craft techniques, extravagances, and as the territory of women, in ways that other areas in our lives such as fine art or politics, have not. Textile scholarship, i.e. the study of and writing about textiles, has expanded considerably over the last three to four decades. For example, there are now a number of journals devoted to textile scholarship, such as *Textile History* (first issued in 1970), *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* (first issued in 1997) and *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* (first issued in 2002). Perhaps because of aims to firmly establish the academic credibility of this new area of study, scholarship has arguably tended towards the theoretical side of a theory-practice continuum. I have suggested in Chapter 2 that we are still searching for appropriate ways to write about textiles without over-theorising or attempting to impose research methodologies in ways ill-suited for the topic..

Through a transparent and careful process of data analysis and collection the research has produced an interpretation which explores and considers the hunches and intuitive understandings that knitters themselves felt about

knitting. The research has demonstrated how a structured research design can be used not to inhibit the feelings, suspicions and tacit knowledge that practitioners 'know' through making, but instead find a way to use different ways of knowing alongside each other to produce a strong fabric of theoretical conclusions. This is a contribution to scholarship as a continuum and as such is intended to serve as a further step in a journey which seeks to explore new and old ways of researching and writing which can do justice to the excitement, importance and reflexivity of textiles.

Focusing on building a detailed understanding of what participants said during interviews necessarily came at some expense, as the wider context in which they lived was left unexplored. Had I taken an ethnographic approach, for example, I may have seen, and therefore included in my analysis, participants in more of their social, cultural, economic and political contexts. I kept a reflective journal throughout the research in an effort to somewhat tackle the reductive nature of representing lived experience in an interview and in turn represent the complexity of communication that took place in that interview in a transcript. Although not writing in as much detail as an ethnographer might, I noted some body language, feelings, and impressions after each interview. These notes were analysed alongside the transcriptions. Ultimately, all research is a balance between breadth and depth and this research is based on a detailed interrogation of the data collected at the sacrifice of looking at the participant's knitting in the context of the rest of their lives. Collecting interview data which tended to be limited to an hour of conversation, rather than more long term participant observation, for example, gives by definition a more partial picture, however was beneficial in allowing a focused analysis and a detailed familiarity with all the data, and provided what was deemed to be sufficient data for comparison within the timeframe of the doctorate.

The analysis and conceptual framework described in this thesis are, as has been discussed, a product of my particular perspective and research design. Had the project involved participant observation, practice-based research or experimental interventions, for example, the results may have been different.

Grounded theory afforded the advantage of adjusting the method of data collection and analysis to suit the aims of each stage (Charmaz, 2006), useful in providing me with the opportunity to experiment without significant risk. However, looking back I feel aspects of triangulation could have been addressed by designing a research stage which explicitly sought to test the emerging categories with participants. I did this to some extent in the interviews, but the increased confidence in my ability derived from the doctoral study leads me to look more widely at more creative ways to involve participants. For example, emergent categories could have provided the basis for discussion groups where visual or sensory methods could have been used to elicit self-reflection and critical discussion. This reflection on the potential of participatory research methods is likely to also stem from my experience of teaching undergraduates during the final year of doctoral study as this has exposed me to various group discussion activities and increased my confidence in leading sessions.

9.4.3 Positioning oneself within the research: Reflecting on insiderness

Being part of what one is studying, whether through initial involvement or through increasing familiarity with research subject and subjects, is a crucial part of grounded theory but also congruent with the critical realist perspective taken in this research which sees outsiderhood as unachievable (Charmaz, 2006; López and Potter, 2001). The researcher is necessarily an insider as they cannot step outside of their own experience and take a bird's eye view of the social world. However, the aims of doing research, to form some kind of deeper understanding than that which usually results from everyday interactions, conversely do require the researcher to move beyond their position as situating themselves beside their research subjects. The researcher must move beyond the surface meaning of the data they collect to

progress to a deeper level of interpretation. As a researcher seeking to avoid privileging the authorial voice, I therefore felt at times I was balancing two conflicting aims. I was attempting to recognise individual experience and avoid privileging my own status as 'The Researcher' whilst also inevitably taking a powerful position as the one who ultimately decided what was and was not important in the data and what it meant. For example, although some participants said their knitting was commonplace, part of their everyday lives and implied there was no further conceptual meaning to the activity, I suspected this was not the case and so chose to investigate further.

The conflict between my aim to stand alongside the research subjects yet also attribute power to myself as able to interpret what the data means is related to the reflection above concerning participatory research methods. Influenced by my experience of using grounded theory methods and the skills I have developed through facilitating learning and discussion amongst students, I would like to design research in the future that attempted to involve participants in the analysis stages in addition to the data collection stages. Many of the skills the doctorate has developed are not necessarily what I would have anticipated upon starting the research, being interpersonal as much as they are technical. I now want to develop these skills further and explore ways to combine them with my experience as an artist to consider how the core themes I have discovered through studying knitting – creativity, productivity and social interaction – can be fed back into research design in the future as concepts around which to build research methods as well as conclusions.

To enhance the transparency of the research it is important to reflect upon how my own experiences will have affected the decisions I took during the research process and the lines of enquiry I chose to pursue. Although this reflection could have been inserted into the methodology chapter I felt it more appropriate to include here as it is only upon viewing the finished 'fabric' that has been generated through the research process that I can begin to see the effect of my experiences and the small decisions taken along the way. Over the course of the research I have had several experiences that have forced

me to consider my own identity and how I interact with ideas, people and objects which likely effected the lines of enquiry I chose to pursue during data collection, analysis and discussion. I had to decide how to locate myself in relation to the interviewees, how to locate myself in the text of the thesis, and to trust my own abilities in making sense of the data I had collected.

From findings to conclusions this thesis has been shaped by my identity and experiences. For example, whilst another researcher might have been interested in the economic, artistic or political identities that women articulated through their knitting I think it is significant that, at this point in my life, it was the social and creative elements that caught my attention when analysing the data. During the research I experienced a number of significant changes in my life such as moving to a new city and adopting a dog. My working practices and environment changed from working in a communal studio to working alone in front of my computer. I experienced bereavement and trauma. Although I was not conscious of their influence at the time I now suspect these experiences meant I was particularly interested in the various social interactions that interviewees discussed as I was forced to consider, and draw upon, the relationships and interactions that made up my support network and helped me form and maintain my sense of self. Additionally, as a knitter and dressmaker I knew that textiles and the framework of ideas and connotations that surrounded them, were important to me. I knew that I mobilised them deliberately and unconsciously to project a certain identity or create a certain feeling. This research has helped me understand part of how and why I do this.

9.5 Discussing identity and interactions

This section first recaps the three key themes that were identified in the findings, termed creativity, productivity and social interaction. At the risk of being repetitive these themes are summarised here because it is argued that the analysis is more than the sum of its parts. By looking at these themes

together the second research aim, to understand the role that hand knitting plays in some women's lives, is further illuminated by developing two key threads that run through the three themes, characterised as process and continuity. After the three themes are discussed, the section concludes, by considering the primary research aim, regarding how women create and communicate their identities. By drawing the three key themes together, a theoretical framework is developed which suggests that identity creation may be a process which takes place during indirect and direct social interactions. Indirect social interaction is used here to refer to actions and interactions with objects, techniques and ideas, such as considering how other people will view us, what other people expect from us, and with the idea of other people (such as feeling a link to women from the past who knitted). Furthermore, this section considers what the research tells us about what women want from their lives today and proposes avenues for further study.

9.5.1 Creative challenge and control

This section summarises and develops the analysis relating to creativity which were first discussed in Chapter 6. It was argued knitting is an important and accessible form of creativity which is beneficial to the women interviewed for this research. The value of knitting appeared to lie primarily in the process rather than the final product. This process is continuous rather than being limited to the occasional project as knitters are rarely without one or more knitted items 'on the needles'. Three key findings which informed this theme are:

1. The term 'creativity' is used in two different ways by the interviewees but predominantly to refer to their own knitting as involving a creative process of problem identification and solution:
 - Application 1 – creativity was applied by the interviewees to activities they associated with artistic creation or pattern

designers with a focus on the originality and innovative properties of the resulting product.

- Application 2 – creativity was applied to activities, often including their own knitting (although some used similar characteristics without the term ‘creative’), involving problem identification, problem solving, acquisition and mastery of new skills, tolerance of risk, determination, and an investment of time.
2. By engaging in creativity the interviewees seem to feel in control of their movements and the form of their knitting. Furthermore, they can see the tangible evidence of their skill.
 3. Creativity also provides conceptual benefits. Knitting is an activity which seems to provide an ideal balance between challenge and ability which can lead to a liberating loss of self-awareness or relaxation.

The key findings within this theme are illustrated in Figure 14 below. This section develops the conclusions discussed earlier to suggest that knitting, as a form of creativity, is a way that the knitters express and create their sense of identity and that therefore objects and their production are important to our identities.

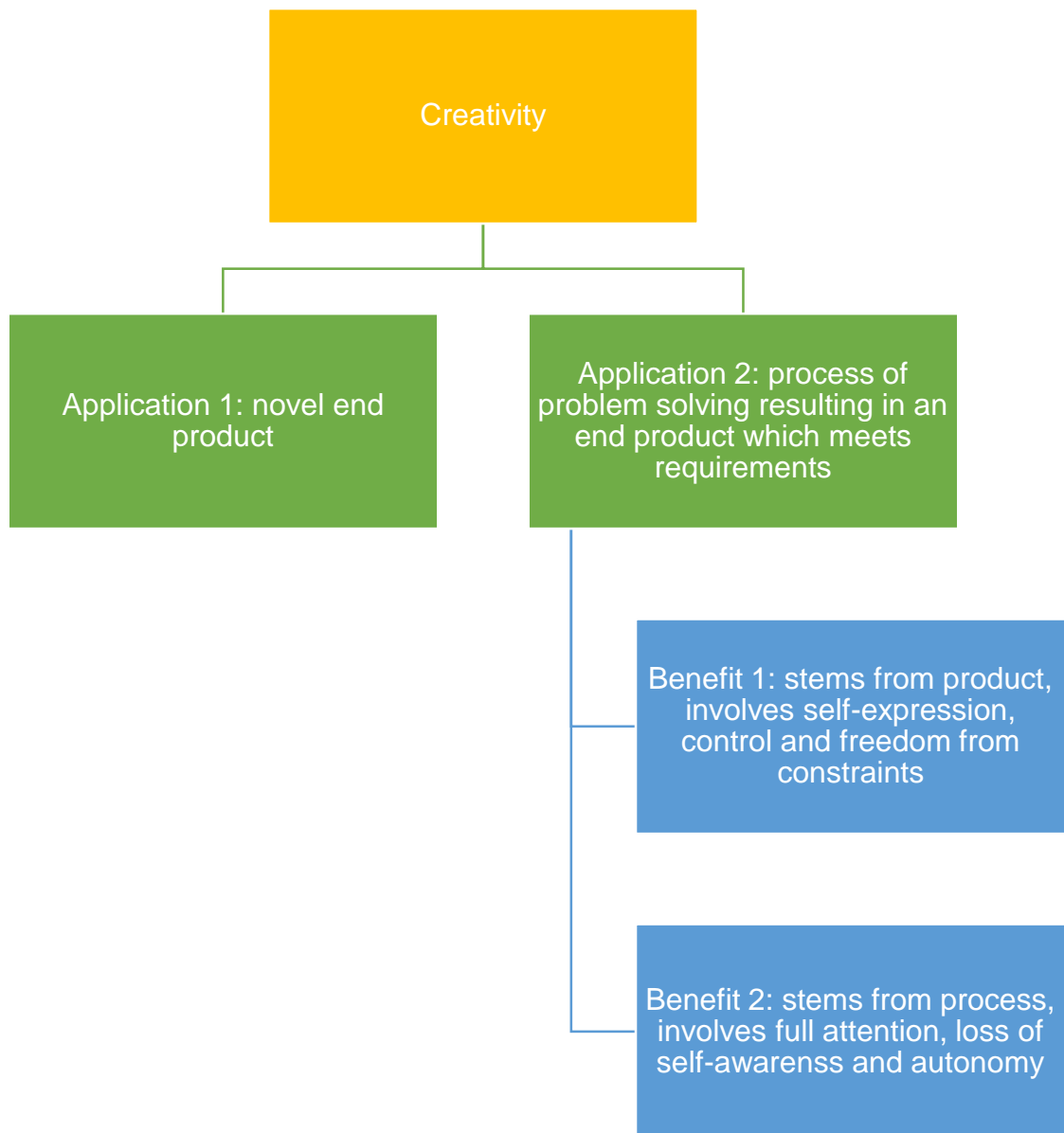


Figure 14: Creativity, themes and subthemes

The literature suggests that objects are important ways to communicate our identities to other people and facilitate relationships (such as Turney, 2009, Miller, 2010). This thesis has built upon these ideas by also considering how the process of creating objects might also be important to our sense of self. This has suggested that the act of knitting creates new objects, invested with meaning and purposes such as to cuddle, to keep warm, and to decorate. These objects go on to have new and multiple lives as they are gifted, mended or unintentionally felt in a washing machine. The physical accoutrements of

knitting can also often impact on everyday lives of the knitters and those they live with as their stashes grow and escape the confines of storage cupboards and boxes. Although the final product is important to the knitters I interviewed in this study, the process and experience of knitting was also found to be as, if not more, significant to them and those around them. This has been understood using ideas of productivity, discussed in the next section, but also of creativity, challenge and skill. This interpretation particularly made use of Csikszentmihalyi's (2002 [1992], 2014) ideas of close attention, balance between challenge and ability, and autonomy in framing knitting as a 'flow' experience.

Analysis in Section 6.2 focused on application 2 as this was how the majority of interviewees saw their own practice. They placed an emphasis on process and fulfilling requirements which stemmed from sources such as:

- Technique and practicalities, such as not unravelling,
- the knitter themselves, such as the desired fit or colour pattern,
- practical or aesthetic concerns of the intended user,
- the values encouraged by society such as being seen as engaging in a productive leisure activity (see next section)
- the values encouraged by the knitting community, such as to be made from local yarn or to a traditional pattern, (see Section 9.4.3).

Interviewees discussed consequences of engaging in this type of creativity which included pride, satisfaction, a loss of self-awareness, relaxation and a feeling of being in control over their decisions, movements and even sometimes their physical and mental space. Creativity can also be dependent on external criteria if the knitter considers societal expectations regarding knitting and creativity, and about how the knitter feels they are seen by other people. Knitting alone can be both individual and solitary and an interaction with other people, or the ideas of other people, and could therefore be termed as both directly and indirectly social.

Respondents described how knitting involved a varying balance between the level of challenge presented and their ability. By adjusting this balance they could choose either relaxing or engaging projects depending on their mood. Knitters talk about both the physical and conceptual experience of knitting as they are soothed by the repetitive motions and enjoy seeing a tangible manifestation of their time and skill yet also engage intellectually with the challenge presented by complex stitch patterns and the memories and ideas triggered when they look at their knitting. I proposed that these findings could be interpreted using Csikszentmihalyi's (2002 [1992], 2014) concept of flow. This analysis suggested two benefits of knitting as a form of creativity:

Benefit 1 – creativity provides the opportunity for self-expression as the knitter has control over the aesthetic and practical decisions regarding what they are making. This is both conceptual, stemming from the knitter's personal requirements and decision making, and physical as she creates and controls a three-dimensional object. Knitting has requirements, both inherent such as having all loops interlocked so the fabric does not unravel and imposed by the knitter such as that bands of colour will fall in the same position on the body and on the arms of a jumper (see a description of Amy's jumper for her husband in Section 6.2). The knitters spoke of both freedom from constraints and also of the freedom stemming from working *within* constraints, whether this is the reassuring guidance of a pattern or the sense of accomplishment stemming from finally cracking a technical problem.

Benefit 2 - This stems from the *experience* of making an object rather than the end product. Becoming engrossed in the process of knitting provides the knitter with an opportunity to lose their self-awareness and make them feel unique as well as represent their uniqueness in the product of their creativity, again being both conceptual and physical and involving mind and body. Creativity can be understood as giving rise to flow experiences, where the

person's full attention is voluntarily devoted to a specific task which presents an achievable level of challenge and which distracts them from their surroundings and the everyday concerns that could otherwise invade their thoughts (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014 [1978]). Knitting seems to provide a sense of individuality and mental, bodily and aesthetic control. Furthermore, this control extends to the decision making process and the opportunity to dictate how time is used which could be unusual in the context of busy lives spent in paid employment or in other forms of work. Through choosing how to use their time, freedom over materials and colours, and a control over the pace at which they work the knitters experience a sense of autonomy and independence, as discussed in Section 6.4.

Studying knitting as a leisure activity has demonstrated how creativity is beneficial and perhaps even vital to the wellbeing of the participants. Findings suggest that creativity is not experienced in some other areas of participant's lives. They often illustrated this assertion with examples drawn from paid work as a time where they did not produce tangible end products, experience autonomy and control, or self-expression. We could propose that this may be so in the case of other creative leisure activities or for people who have not yet identified a creative outlet. Therefore, this area potentially merits further study in order to enable people to access flow experiences, through studying other creative leisure activities.

In addition, this research suggests that it should not be assumed that creativity is the domain only of artists. Furthermore, we should not assume that knitting, and likely other crafts, are void from aesthetic and value-based criticisms and requirements, and that practitioners are not working within demanding boundaries which render the activity challenging and involving considerable skill and determination. The knitters I interviewed often seemed to distinguish between a 'higher level' level form of creativity (discussed as application 1 above) and their own creative abilities (application 2). Knitting seemed to be

presented as 'accessible' because it did not require this 'higher level' creative ability. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that knitting can provide challenge and can be considered a type of flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

The perceived hierarchy of different types of creativity has two implications. Firstly, researchers and commentators may need to be careful in the assumptions they might make when looking at knitting and other traditionally feminine crafts which might be attributed a low cultural value. Artists and gatekeepers of the artistic world such as gallery owners and critics are not the only ones able to recognise and engage in creativity and the aesthetic, practical and cultural conventions and requirements that accompany it. This research has demonstrated how many of the knitters had a complex understanding of their own practice and, whether or not they used the term 'creativity' to describe it, recognised the areas of their life where intellectual challenge and physical competency provided significant rewards.

It could be argued that these findings demonstrate that traditional gendered distinctions between low- and high-value cultural activities continue to have an impact on how women talk about and conceive of their own activities and abilities. If this is the case, further study seems necessary to explore not only the benefits of creativity and how it can be experienced during leisure time but also consideration of the impact gender has on the value individuals and society places upon activities such as knitting.

9.5.2 Producing identity and productive identities

This section discusses ideas proposed in Chapter 7 relating to the key theme of productivity. This theme was based on findings which included:

1. Knitting can be viewed as conceptual and physical work which produces memories, roles and identities.

2. Knitting enables women to be productive with their leisure time.

Figure 15, below, summarises how each sub-theme is further divided. Theorists including Horsdal (2012:49) who explores the notion of memory and autobiography, Stebbins (1985, 1992) who has studied different types of leisure activity, and Bourdieu (1984) who suggested that societal expectations and individual desires both have an impact on our behaviour, were used to develop a conceptual framework. . Furthermore, through considering how creativity is also dependent on external criteria about what knitting should be and about how the knitter feels they are seen by other people we can see how knitting alone can be both individual and solitary and an interaction with other people. This section suggests identity construction and communication can be understood as involving an interaction with societal expectations and personal needs.

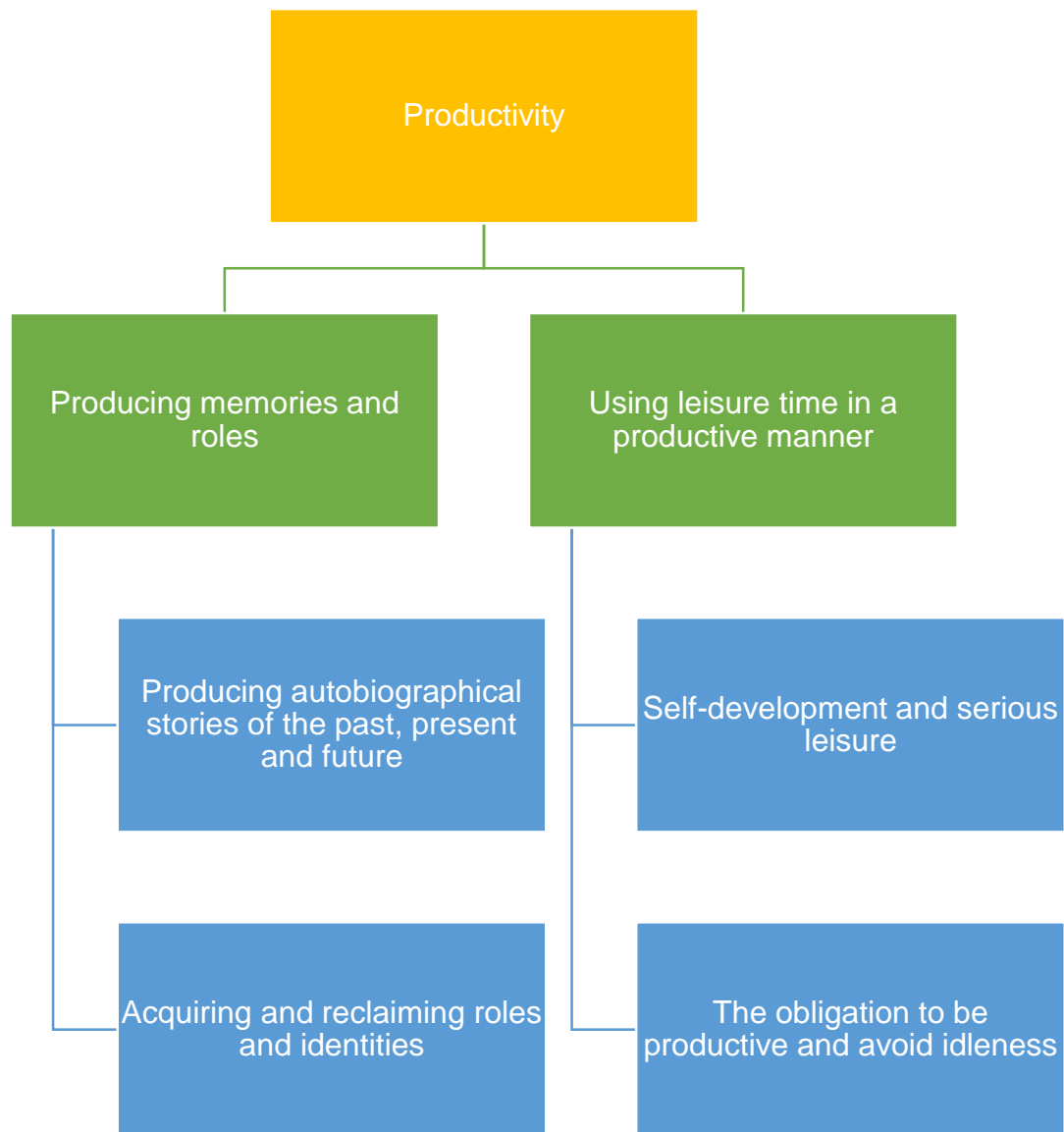


Figure 15: Productivity, themes and subthemes

Section 7.2 suggested that knitting can tell us stories about who we were, are and aspire to be by triggering memories and associations. Research such as that by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) and Banin and Guy (2001) have found that objects in a person's current possession can create, reflect and communicate a sense of self by reminding us of who we were, want to be, do not want to be and our presence within social networks. Through studying knitting we can also consider how remembering the creation of objects (which may no longer be in the knitter's possession or even in

existence) can similarly aid in giving the individual a sense of continuity with people they knew, places they have been, and a sense of self which exists over a length of time. It was suggested that knitting is productive in that the actions and the objects trigger memories and these memories can in turn produce a sense of self, both over time and in relation to roles, often gendered, the knitter chooses to adopt or has placed upon her by others. It has been discussed how remembered projects seemed to remind the knitter of their social and physical surroundings as they talked about the places they were and the people who were important to them whilst they were knitting the item. Interviewees particularly associated knitting with stability when discussing crises or changes in their lives such as relocation and changes in personal relationships. It was noted that interviewees benefitted from being able to build a sense of a stable identity which stretched into the future as well as the past. A stash of yarn seems to act as a symbolic reminder that whatever the future holds there will be yarn to knit with and therefore continuing in an individual as a knitter. A maker's stash or 'to do list' of future projects (on *Ravelry*, on paper, or in the knitter's imagination) facilitates looking forward in addition to looking backwards.

The notion that memories can be generative of identity and an indirect form of social interaction may seem easy to criticise as trite or romanticised, but the potential for objects and memories to be important to our identity and future sense of self can arguably be seen across many aspects of daily lives in the photographs we take and the items we keep for reasons outside of their functional or aesthetic use (see for example Kuhn, 2002). Given that other researchers such as Turney (2009) have demonstrated the emotional potential of the act of knitting something by hand as a gift it arguably follows that handmade objects can become emotive 'storyteller's' for the maker.

The creation of a knitted autobiography, extending backwards and forwards, can be both a private and public exercise. A knitter's work can today be subject to public attention through the internet rather than only through those who viewed their knitted items directly. Knitters can access each other's knitted

achievements and failures on the website *Ravelry*. Furthermore, the knitter can see, if they have chosen to upload notes and photographs, a history of their knitting in a more permanent and thorough sense than perhaps they have ever been able to in the past. The impact of the internet on knitting as a social, embodied and tangible activity forms the focus of the currently ongoing doctoral study by Mayne (2015) and research by Wei (2004) and Orton-Johnson (2012), and seems a rich avenue for further study regarding the interaction between our online and offline activities in the digital age.

It was suggested that knitting 'produces' roles and values in addition to memories. The knitter can attempt to influence how others see her and how she sees herself by using knitting invoke particular associations. For example with motherhood or caring roles, and/or its practical consequences, for example relaxation during periods of anxiety or reducing the frustration of insomnia. Therefore, knitting involves both personal and societal norms and values. In Chapter 7 the values and roles associated with knitting, by other people and by the knitters, was understood using Bourdieu's (1984) proposition that societal structures are maintained only through repetition but that we can equally act because of personal desires and beliefs and often do a mix of both at the same time. This was a useful theoretical concept for its potential to allow for a tension between societal expectations and individual wishes. For example, for one woman interviewed knitting was something she seemed to feel she ought to do to embrace her new role as an aunt. Contrastingly, another interviewee explicitly said she used knitting to negotiate her new role as a mother with her sense of being an individual and a skilled knitter. The roles associated with knitting, productive and autonomous, are both about how these knitters feel about themselves and how they anticipate other people will see them, as women, as someone who can make things skilfully, and as carers. By choosing to knit and be seen by others as a knitter women can adopt some of the identity facets associated with knitting through interacting with the idea of what knitting is and the idea of what a knitter is. These ideas may stem from the individual knitter, their community, or narratives in wider society. In this sense knitting can produce new identities

and reproduce societal structures through both direct and mediated social interactions.

Knitting can trigger positive and negative assumptions about the knitter which may be outside of the knitter's control. Members of the public seem to feel comfortable approaching knitters and sometimes associate them with female relatives from their past. Knitting may have acquired additional meanings in its contemporary manifestation as a leisure activity, as the 'new yoga' or a feminist weapon (Chansky, 2010) which are added to a complex set of existing associations. Knitters may have little control over how or whether people who see them knitting associate them with various stereotypes and ideas. Associations such as being approachable and productive may be embedded in the very substance of the craft. It was suggested in Chapter 7 that knitters create their identity by creating a complex fabric which is warm, soft, protective and shaped to the body. This in turn can reflect notions of productivity, protection and caring, parts of women's relationships with the receivers of their knitting, whether friends or family. Through knitting women can embody aspects of the collective identity of 'the knitter' as the activity is visibly productive, useful, functional, controlled, skilled, and caring. Alternatively, other interviewees said they had been subject to negative comments associating them with the 'spinster' as an older, single woman, and kitsch, bad taste, and unwanted gifts.

The second sub-theme within the wider theme of productivity relates to the gender based roles introduced in the previous paragraphs. Women might feel an obligation to care for other people by producing things for them, a responsibility which may be balanced by fulfilling their own personal needs. As discussed in Section 7.4 the interviewees talked about how knitting sometimes contributed to their self-development and positive identification as they build their skills and use their leisure time in something which required hard work and determination. Contrastingly, Section 7.5 outlined how knitting could be motivated by a sense of obligation in addition to a welcome opportunity to experience pride and enjoyment in caring for others through gift giving.

As set out in Section 7.4, Stebbins' (1985) theory that serious leisure activities, those requiring a serious investment of time and effort to develop skills, are crucial to our self-fulfilment and wellbeing. These activities contrast with casual leisure such as watching television which, according to Stebbins (1985) induce feelings of apathy and disempowerment. Knitting bears many of the traits of a serious leisure activity in that it requires a considerable devotion of time and effort and it involves routine and structure in the form of knitting groups, individual patterns and preferred techniques. Stebbins (1985) provides a useful framework to aid in understanding how serious leisure activities provide, in return for a challenging and sometimes frustrating experience, rewards such as self-development and a sense of achievement. As discussed above knitting can be a way to develop into the person one aspires to be and is a source of intellectual and physical challenge and training as the knitter gains mastery over her own skills, the movements of her fingers, yarn and needles.

Feelings of satisfaction stemming from serious leisure and flow are the positive side of productivity and hard work. The other consequence of productivity is a sense of obligation and guilt which, although not a major theme in the interviews, was nevertheless present and striking in the context of an elected leisure activity. Some interviewees did experience some demand on their time from other people who requested items to be made for them or they felt they should spend time on other people rather than themselves. On the whole making things for other people was welcomed as a chance to demonstrate care and foster relationships. However, amongst some discussions of knitted gifts and knitting to avoid idleness there were hints that knitters could feel an obligation to counteract the luxury of knitting for oneself, or even spending time at leisure, by knitting for other people.

It has been suggested that traditional narratives regarding femininity encourage women to arrange their activities by prioritising the needs of those around them (Jurczyk, 1998). These narratives can be associated both with patriarchy and with practicality, see Wayland Barber (1996). Making textiles as a leisure activity however, rather than something done out of necessity, means

the idea of gender roles is less clear cut, if it ever was. Leisure time is potentially problematic in a traditional narrative of femininity which positions women's time as ideally spent in the service of others. As discussed in Section 7.5, to comply with this narrative leisure time should therefore be organised around the needs of others but this is at odds with other functions and definitions of leisure time as periods where the individual has more control over her activities.

Similarly, for the knitters interviewed here, spare time or time spent in casual leisure, particularly television watching, seemed to be viewed as a sign of idleness and therefore to be avoided and filled with the productivity of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992). Some knitters also imposed restrictions and obligations, for example, knitters talked of being 'strict' with themselves about finishing one project before starting another and others made themselves return to something which they had lost interest in. Knitting therefore seems to be associated with particular gender-based roles surrounding caring for both oneself and for others and with a strong work-ethic applied to a leisure activity. Rather than leisure as spare time, knitting adds to an intensification of time use where women may be doing several things at once such as watching television or waiting to collect children, as well as knitting. Here we can see further how societal expectations and cultural norms interact with individual needs and beliefs. Knitting can be seen as productive of memories, roles, and identities and as a way that women negotiate their individual needs with expectations that stem, or that they imagine stem, from those around them.

9.5.3 Social interactions, inclusions and exclusions

This section recaps key elements of the final theme, characterised as social interaction. This theme was developed on findings which include:

1. For many knitting provides the opportunity to interact with other knitters, such as with other users of the *Ravelry* website or at a knitting group.

Social interactions with other knitters facilitate technical support but additionally and importantly offer the opportunity for women to access personal support.

2. Knitting can offer a sense of belonging to a community of other like-minded women or part of a history of women who have knitted over time.
3. There are shared values within the knitting community which serve as a bond between knitters but may exclude some people who do not have access to the economic or cultural resources to engage in the community.

Figure 16, below, illustrates the core themes and subthemes which are summarised here. The section discusses the suggestion made in Chapter 8 that social interactions are important to the wellbeing of the knitters. It was argued that these social interactions can be direct (online and face to face) but also indirect. Knitters feel they have a connection with the idea of other women who knit or have knitted over hundreds of years without having to directly interact with them. Indirect social interaction, used here to refer to interactions with social and cultural ideas, the anticipation of how others will see us, and object mediated interactions such as gift giving, is expanded upon in the next section.

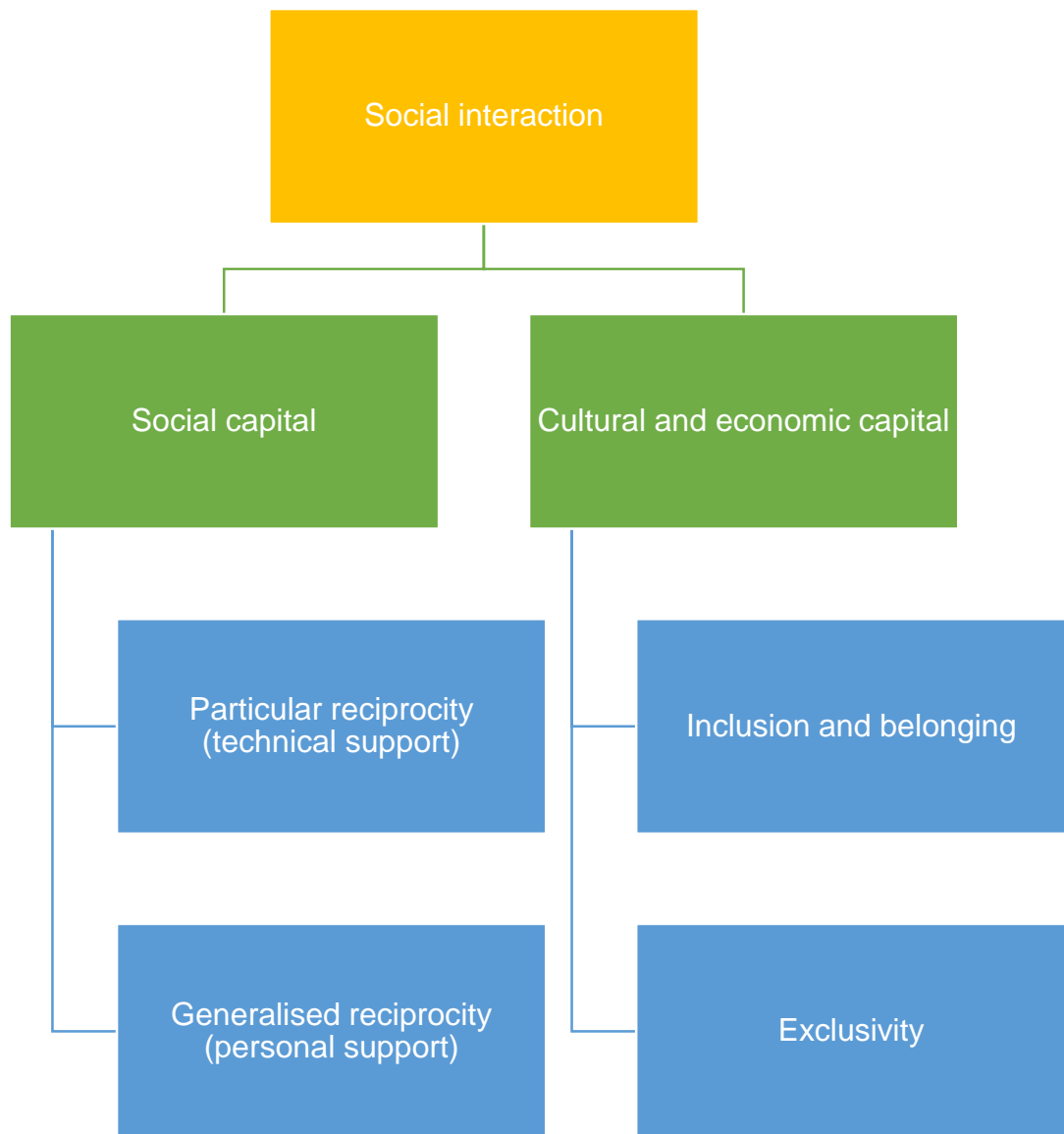


Figure 16: Social interaction, themes and subthemes

Respondents interacted with other knitters in a range of ways such as weekly knitting group meetings or looking at and posting on the website *Ravelry*. Those who attended knitting groups reported enjoying them greatly and receiving technical help and encouragement from other members. However, importantly, they also said other members offered personal support and talked about all areas of life. It was found that there was a community of knitters which was local and international and which involved some direct and strong social interactions and other indirect and more disparate interaction. This community

seemed to share a 'language' of techniques, terminology, designers and patterns. They also shared some of the same values, particularly favouring natural fibres and local producers.

It has been described how for many of the knitters in this study attending a knitting group was an important part of their lives. For some it was even the main motivation for starting or continuing their knitting. The previous themes suggested that knitters do so at least as much for the experience of knitting rather than because they need the end products. Similarly by looking at participant's experience of interacting with other knitters it seemed that for some the chance to feel part of a community, especially of other women, was a considerable motivation for pursuing knitting as a leisure activity (rather than receiving technical advice to help create the end products). This is an interesting conjunction of two motivations in one leisure activity, and sets knitting apart from some other leisure activities. One motivation is to challenge oneself to improve skills and the other is to socialise. More often than not the second motivation, to socialise, is at odds with skilled knitting, although at times skills may be acquired through the help of more experienced knitting group members. Knitting is a multifaceted activity that may be moulded to suit the knitter's needs as they seek either of these motivations.

It was suggested that participation in this community allows the women to build their social capital, defined as the way in which we can make gains, solve problems and discover opportunities through the network of relationships we build. This social capital can be redeemed for technical help but crucially the relationships are strong enough to facilitate emotional support and friendship outside of the technicalities of knitting (Putnam, 2000). The community seems to encourage reciprocal support and openness. Through knitting they embody the values of this community and their membership, picking up on notions of caring for and producing for other people discussed in the previous section.

Social and geographic mobility and technological developments mean that in the UK many of our social interactions may have decreased or become largely digitally mediated. In 2013 60% of people living in the UK who used the internet

also used social network sites, a rise of 43% in five years (Government Office for Science, 2013). Green and Canny (2003) identified the increasing numbers of people relocating for job-related reasons. They predict a trend in more women relocating for work and more single people who relocate. This raises implications for social isolation both for relocators but also for elderly people without close family members and young people who are increasingly living with their parents until an older age and may be required to relocate along with them (Green and Canny, 2003). It is now arguably easier for many people to keep in touch with distant friends and family through the comparatively low cost of phone calls and use of online social media such as *Skype* (which facilitates online video calls) or *Facebook* (a leading social network). However, not everyone has access to the internet and it has been suggested that digital social interactions are not of the same quality as face-to-face interactions (Pinker, 2014).

Some interviewees discussed deliberately joining knitting groups to meet people after moving to a new city, job or even country suggesting that social isolation cannot be tackled solely through the social contact digital technology can now facilitate. During data collection I noted in my research journal how attractive I found the community which the interviewees were telling me about in terms of its inclusivity and opportunity to 'belong' to a group with similar values who offered support to each other. It could be suggested that the women interviewed for this study are examples of Putnam's (2000) social capitalists, people who are addressing the lack of social connections and community by creating opportunities for social interactions such as knitting groups or *Ravelry*.

It was suggested above the knitting provided short and medium term continuity and stability within individual projects and the knitter's lifetime. Furthermore, it was argued in Chapter 8 that knitting also offered a longer term continuity as respondents felt connecting with the other women who had knitted in the past and that they were continuing a traditional skill which would be passed on to other knitters in the future. This is not 'History' as written in textbooks but is

instead a personal perception held about women in the past who used the same techniques as we do today. Even as a solitary activity knitting may be indirectly social by continuing a skill, producing gifts for others, and identifying with other knitters. The findings of this research suggest that recognition of the benefits for wellbeing which stem from knitting with others should not be paired with an assumption that knitting alone is symptomatic of loneliness and social isolation.

9.5.4 Knitting identities through interactions: Theoretical propositions

This section moves on from summarising the analytical themes to discussing what these can tell us about how women form and communicate their identities, the overarching meta-level aim of this research. This section does not introduce new ideas but is based on the premise that some of the core conclusions of the analysis are best discussed in the light of all three themes in conjunction as well as the individual summaries above. This framework helps us understand how the women studied seem to form and communicate identities through their knitting during their leisure time. Creativity, skill, producing objects and memories, and interacting with societal expectations are important parts of these identities, as proposed above. It is argued that these identities are based on interactions which are not only directly social but also indirectly when mediated through objects or through an individual's idea of other people, such as the knitter identifying with women knitters from the past. This research offers a way to understand how we use and make objects to create our identities by applying Jenkins' (2004) theoretical conception of identity to ideas about interactions with objects which have been previously studied by authors such as Turney (2009) and Miller (2010).

The meaningful and supportive social interactions that are available to knitters, from online forums and knitting groups, have been discussed in the last theme

above. This is congruent with Jenkins' (2004) conception of identity generated through social interaction, as outlined in Section 2.2. This research also sheds light on how knitting was also indirectly social. Knitting has been explored as a physical and conceptual process which can be indirectly social when the knitter interacts with the idea of other knitters and the connotations surrounding women and knitters. This included both their own ideas of what they should or wanted to be doing and also their understanding of societal expectations that may be placed upon them, such as spending time caring or producing for others, autonomy and independence, different types of creativity and values such as authenticity.

Participation in knitting, even when done alone, seems to reference a system of ideas which are perpetuated through the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). Through repetition in knitting groups, instructional books and increasingly through the internet, these values are maintained and communicated. Respondents said they thought knitting was associated with various ideas, both positive and negative, old and new. They said knitting was associated with homely grandmothers, economy and ingenuity, a middle class fashion fad, activism, feminism, and unequal gender roles. It has been argued in this thesis that when a woman knits she interacts with an existing framework of ideas surrounding knitters which range from stereotypes to historical realities. This has reflected some of my own experiences. When I tell people I knit and sew I have experienced admiration, amusement, surprise and puzzlement. I am pleased to be able to connect to my own family history through knitting or more widely through textiles, for example I wear dresses that my great aunt made for my grandma when she was in her twenties and living in India (I even have the original sewing pattern she used for one of them).

The research has suggested that the habitus that unites knitters and gives them a sense of community and belonging may conversely exclude those without the material, cultural or social capital required to participate. These hunches are included here as they were outside the research aims but may suggest avenues for future study. Analysis suggested that there existed

particular cultural norms within the knitting community that required both cultural and economic capital, for example the expense of knitting with natural fibres and luxury needles. In the context of increased levels of reported loneliness and social isolation, as discussed in an American and UK context by Putnam (2010) and Pinker (2014) respectively, it is necessary that researchers seek to better understand what barriers there are to social inclusion and how leisure activities may be able to tackle this. Furthermore, this research suggests that even solitary leisure activities may increase social inclusion and contribute to a sense of self which is established through interaction, as in the case of knitting alone.

Considering the implications of inequality is pertinent as this is a topic of current concern. Over the last five years there have been a number of popular non-fiction publications concerning the self-perpetuating nature of inequality and which argue that the whole of society would benefit from equality (see for example Pickett and Wilkinson, 2009; Lansley, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012). The rise of this type of publication reflects concerning national figures. The Equality Trust (2014) have reported that in the UK the richest 100 people had the same wealth as the poorest 30% of households which is about 18,900,000 people. The Equality Trust (2014) link this inequality with factors such as life expectancy, obesity, higher levels of imprisonment and murder, and teenage births.

The research did not set out to explore the socioeconomic status of women who knit, but it is possible to draw some hunches from the data which could be explored further in the future. The sample consisted almost entirely of those who might be considered middle class in that they were in stable jobs within sectors such as education and governance. Respondents often spoke about being busy and having responsibilities connected to paid work or in caring for children. They also spoke of how much time they devoted to knitting, planning knitting projects, purchasing and researching supplies for knitting, and browsing and participating in discussions on the Ravelry website. The knitters studied here present an interesting situation, where women for whom time

outside of paid and caring responsibilities may be scarce choose to engage in a time consuming and demanding hobby. Members of all classes can have demanding and time consuming jobs, but perhaps it is only those who have economic stability that can engage in a leisure activity such as knitting because of financial factors, and access to childcare and cultural capital.

The rather uniform characteristics of the sample prevent comparisons between social groups but the research does demonstrate how paid work and caring responsibilities may not prevent women from undertaking a 'serious' leisure activity such as knitting. Springgay et al. (2011) have observed that, in the context of knitting as a form of activism amongst University students, participants were predominantly white, middle class and female. My research supports these hunches and suggests that, if some people do not have access to creative and social leisure activities, further research is warranted that would empirically test this hunch and identify ways to increase access. If, as Pickett and Wilkinson (2010) suggest, inequality makes us unhappier and unhealthier, research exploring leisure, creativity and social interaction may be vital in improving our society by increasing levels of wellbeing and social participation. This research suggests there may be potential for applying these ideas to the context of leisure and social capital, building on the work of Putnam (2000) already discussed in this thesis. If accessing creativity, productivity and meaningful social interaction are important aspects of leisure time, and if some are unable to access these, there is the potential for negative consequences for wellbeing that merit future study. Putnam (2000) and Pinker (2014) emphasise the benefits of social interaction, as has my research. Additionally, others are promoting benefits of engaging in creativity such as those promoted by Csikszentmihalyi (2014) and discussed in this thesis. For example the London Arts in Health Forum (2012) organise an annual 'Creativity and Wellbeing Week'.

Stalp (2015) has recently observed that leisure activities traditionally thought of as 'feminine' have received little academic scrutiny. This research offers an insight into why knitting, which could be characterised as a feminine activity,

might have not received as much empirical study as other leisure activities. It could be proposed that it would be difficult to see the significance of knitting as a leisure activity whilst also maintaining traditional distinctions between leisure time (as relaxing, unchallenging, and within bracketed times and locations) and work (as paid, outside the home, the source of an identity and of productivity and value). In the case of knitting as a leisure activity, my research has suggested that to understand its significance we must frame it as productive, hard work, and vital to a sense of self as social and skilled. I would argue that leisure time, if defined as 'spare' time to be filled with casual activities, and work, if seen as contrastingly involving challenge and obligation, may not be distinct categories. Framing traditionally feminine activities as casual and solitary leisure activities may partly contribute to researchers overlooking their significance to those who undertake them.

These conclusions also present implications for the study of women's leisure activities by suggesting the need to avoid framing leisure and work as distinct, but of differing levels of electivity. Boundaries between responsibilities or necessary tasks, and leisure or spare time became blurred when knitters worked on their projects whilst waiting to collect children, travelling as part of their paid work, and during lectures and talks. Further blurring leisure and paid work distinctions, knitters regularly refer to their leisure activity as 'work' when they speak of 'working on projects' and knitted objects as 'my work'. This demonstrates the value of studying activities which may be doubly overlooked as both leisure activities and 'feminine' and deemed not significant or meaningful because of the value-based associations of these labels.

One of the criticisms that could be levelled against this research is that it is merely confirming some of the things that were already known such as that knitting is creative, productive and can be social. I suggest it is important to explore ideas empirically that may already be suspected in a practice setting in order to establish evidence for them and tackle taken-for-granted assumptions. With regards to knitting, which may well be overlooked because it is deemed of little academic interest or complexity, this research has

demonstrated that even those activities we may feel very familiar with warrant further scrutiny to provide an insight into questions of importance such as regarding our identities and the norms and values of our society. The conclusions presented here may not be unique to knitting as a leisure activity. However, I suggest it remains useful to consider the three core themes that appear in this particular combination in knitting, namely 'creativity', 'productivity' and 'social capital', to help us understand more about what some women want from their leisure time and how they form and communicate their identities. Knitting is a visible activity and one where people can undertake the same activity, even the same pattern, at the same time around the world and this may mean it can counter the anonymity of the internet and instead take advantage of the social connections it makes possible. Even those who do not attend knitting groups or interact with other knitters on the internet can draw upon the sense that knitting connects them with their mothers and grandmothers. Through knitting women can balance their desires to create unique, individual identities and to experience social approval from a group of people with shared interests.

This chapter has demonstrated the core contributions the research makes by drawing together the methodological, theoretical and thematic threads that run through the thesis. The chapter has argued that by looking at how knitting is creative, challenging, productive and social it has been possible to generate insights into the role that leisure activities play in creating and communicating identity. The research suggests that intellectual challenge, physical and conceptual autonomy, and tangible evidence of time, effort and skill are all important to the women studied here. Additionally, knitting can, as an activity which is done alone and in groups, and which comes with new and old stereotypes, shed light on the nature of identity construction as an ongoing process involving negotiations between societal and individual expectations. The research proposes that to study knitting either as an individual activity or in a group context creates only a partial understanding and to study both, whilst inevitably sacrificing depth, affords new perspectives. By studying the experience it has been possible to see how identity creation and

communication takes place through interactions with other people, mediated through objects, and through an interaction with the personal and societal ideas surrounding gendered roles and societal values.

Reaching the end of this thesis I have presented a number of propositions about why contemporary women knit and how they position themselves in relation to other people, their pasts, their womanhood and their futures. Throughout the research journey I have sought to reflect upon myself as a knitter and as a woman and shed light on my own priorities and personal history. For me the key findings have highlighted the importance of connecting with our personal and collective histories and the people around us through everyday creativity.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethical review and considerations

The research was completed according to the ethical guidelines provided by the University of Edinburgh. A self-audit was completed and included below. This found no further ethical review was required as sensitive information relating to participants was not collected nor were participants from vulnerable groups.

Appendix 1.1 Ethical considerations and risk analysis

This section outlines how the research was conducted in an ethical manner in line with University guidelines. The research was conducted with:

- Dignity, respect, care and honesty. This was done by informing participants of the aims of the research before their consent to participate was sought (see Appendix section 3.2). Anonymity was guaranteed and data was kept password protected. The research was undertaken and reported with honesty and openness.
- Integrity was ensured by my taking personal responsibility for my work when published and acknowledging any other authors. This thesis and any related publications do not contain plagiarism and all viewpoints which are not my own are acknowledged.
- Objectivity was ensured by discussing the implications of my personal experiences and outlook.

- Accountability is demonstrated through keeping full records of the data and notes detailing the rationale behind daily decisions (see Appendix section 4.1 for extracts from my research log). This contributes to the validity of the claims and ensures I could answer any freedom of information requests from participants. The research was open to external scrutiny throughout in the form of informal discussions with peers and supervisors.
- Due consideration of risk. Working with participants opens the research to the risk of problems such as not finding enough or suitable people to study or participant withdrawal. Data collection was started early in the project in order to allow for adjustment if any of these issues were to arise. I was not entering places which presented me a risk, however when arranging a meeting with and I ensured someone else knew of my whereabouts.

Appendix 1.2 Ethical review self-audit

The University of Edinburgh

Edinburgh College of Art

RESEARCH, ETHICS AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE COMMITTEE

Self-Audit Checklist for Level 1 Ethical Review

The audit should be carried out by the Principal Investigator, except as follows:

- ***Postdoctoral Research Fellowships***: the applicant in collaboration with their mentor
- ***Postgraduate Research (MSc, MScR and PhD)***: the student in collaboration with their first supervisor
- ***Undergraduate dissertations and student projects***: the student in collaboration with their dissertation/project supervisor

Title of Project: Knitting Identities: Creativity and Community amongst Women Hand Knitters in Edinburgh

Funding Body (if applicable): University Scholarship

Principal Investigator/Supervisor Name: Ed Hollis (ECA), Jessica Hemmings (NCAD)

Student Name and Matriculation Number: Kate Lampitt Adey, s1250394

Type of Student: PhD ✓ Masters by Research
Taught Masters Honours

1. Protection of research subject confidentiality

Are there any issues of confidentiality which are not adequately handled by the normal tenets of ethical academic research?

NO ✓ YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

These include mutually understood agreements about

- Non attribution of individual responses
- Individuals and organisations being anonymised in publications and presentations, if requested
- Feedback to collaborators, rights to edit responses, and intellectual property rights and publication

2. Data protection and consent

Are there issues of data handling and consent which are not adequately dealt with and compliant with academic procedures?

NO ✓

YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

These include well-established sets of undertakings for example, regarding

- Compliance with the University of Edinburgh's Data Protection procedures

(www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk)

- Respondents giving consent regarding the collection of personal data

- No special issues arising confidentiality/informed consent

3. Moral issues and Researcher/Institutional Conflicts of Interest

Are there any special moral issues/conflicts of interest?

NO ✓

YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

For example

- might the researcher compromise the research objectivity or independence in return for financial or non-financial benefit for themselves, a relative or friend?

- are there any particular moral issues or concerns which arise, for example, where the purposes of research are concealed, where respondents are

unable to provide informed consent, or where research findings impinge negatively/differentially upon the interests of participants

4. Potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress

Is there a significant foreseeable potential harm or stress for those involved in your research?

NO ✓

YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

Is there significant foreseeable potential for physical harm or stress for those involved in your research?

NO ✓

YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

Is there significant foreseeable risk to the researcher?

NO ✓

YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

5. Bringing the University into disrepute

Is there any aspect of the proposed research which might bring the University into disrepute?

NO ✓

YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

6. Vulnerable participants

Are any of the participants or interviewees in the research vulnerable, e.g. children and young people?

NO ✓

YES (If yes, Level 2 assessment required)

Overall assessment

If all answers are No, the Self-assessment has been completed and confirms the absence of reasonably foreseeable ethical risks. The following text should be emailed to the relevant person below

Text ““I confirm that I have carried out the School Ethics self-audit in relation to my proposed research project [insert name and funding body] and that no reasonably foreseeable ethical risks have been identified.”

Research grants, Postgraduate Research and Undergraduate Research – PI should email the text to the School Research Office and provide either an electronic or paper copy of their completed form

If one or more answers are Yes, Level 2 assessments is required.

Signed...



Date.....18/04/13...

Appendix 2 Stage 1 report

This section contains documents relating to Stage 1 of the research, a mixed methods pilot study consisting of a Focus Group, a brief textual analysis of five blogs published by women who make textiles, a textual analysis of an instructional knitting book, and an interview analysed using two pre-defined coding schemes. The aims and methodological outcomes of this research stage are described in more detail in Section 3.3.1 of the main thesis. The results of the pilot study are discussed in Section 4.2 of the thesis.

Appendix 2.1 Focus group

The Focus Group took place with a knitting group which meets weekly at a library in Edinburgh. The Focus Group took place over two hours during April 2013. Five women attended the meeting and their approximate ages ranged between 40 and 70 years old. I did not use a Dictaphone or make notes for two reasons, firstly before attending I had considered using this as an opportunity to explore the idea of producing reflective notes after data collection in order to capture what I felt, remembered and observed in ways that a transcript might not capture. Secondly, on attending the meeting I felt asking to record or even taking notes might affect the flow of conversation. I appreciated that the knitters seemed to be treating me like another knitting group member and did not want to affect this position. After the group I made notes, working on these immediately after the group and then over the next

couple of days as I thought over the conversations that had taken place.

These notes were then coded using a simple content analysis procedure into key themes, both methodological and content-based and including the women's reasons for knitting and for attending the knitting group, the type of conversation that took place and my role as researcher/knitter.

In order to contextualise the discussion below, brief biographies of each knitter are provided (names have been changed to preserve anonymity):

Anna was approximately in her forties, worked full-time and was knitting the neckline of a jumper.

Beatrice was about 60. She was retired and seemed to lead conversation. She brought a scarf pattern along to share with the group as it had an unusual method of construction. She was working on a version of this scarf as a gift for her neighbour.

Carmen was the oldest member of the group, about 70, and had grown up on Shetland. She had knitted all her life and was working on a white shawl in plain stocking stitch on thin, metal needles bent to fit her hands.

Denise was about 60 and was knitting a green and blue cardigan for her grandson. She was unravelling a couple of inches of her knitting because she had noticed that she had split the cotton yarn in a stitch and she was not happy with how this looked.

Edna was the only member of the group who was not originally from Scotland. She was of Asian descent and had grown up in Birmingham. She

was about 40 and was working full-time. She had a frenetic conversation style and was dressed in running clothes as she had just returned from exercising. She had been taught to knit over the last year by Beatrice and liked to knit wacky tea cosies for charity.

These women were temporarily joined by two teenagers who had been taught to knit in previous meetings. These girls did not stay for long but chatted to the group in a friendly manner despite the age gap between them.

Appendix 2.1.1 Motivations to knit

When asked why they knitted the women were quick to identify 'feeling productive' as an important motivation. Some talked about how satisfying watching something grow and completing a project was. However, this prompted Anna to say she conversely disliked finishing and felt bereft at not having that project to work on anymore. This meant she often had many projects started and few finished. Throughout the conversation the women talked about not liking not doing anything for example Edna said she knitted because 'it stops me committing murder'. She indicated she had to be doing something, and that if it was not knitting it would be playing scrabble with friends on 'Facebook' or walking the dog. The group particularly mentioned knitting whilst watching television, and said they would not want to watch television without knitting as this would be a waste of time.

Carmen thought she had got her work ethic from her mother, reminiscing that her mother would always read the paper after dinner and then knit until going to bed. Alice speculated that this work ethic might be associated with a Protestant background, but Carmen said no, her mother was Church of England. Carmen said she was taught to knit at the age of five and as a child was expected to knit clothing whenever she had time. Her hands were twisted with arthritis and she told me that this was because she had knitted so much for seventy years. She said she chose smaller projects now because bigger projects were too heavy to hold when on the needles. Beatrice recollected when her children were young she used to stir the children's dinner on the hob and knit. She said other times she would be able to judge the twenty minutes it took to cook by how much knitting she had done. The women all agreed that they went through phases of feeling in the right mood to knit or not. They said in summer they did less as they did not like having sweaty hands. They spoke of feeling in a certain frame of mind when the knitting just flowed and when they ended up staying up late as they kept saying 'just a few more rows'. Two members spoke of having to cut back sometimes as they got sore hands, and Carmen showed me how she had a dent on her finger from doing a lot of cable stitch at one point.

The group talked about the relaxation of knitting when they were in the right mood and one mentioned she had read something about it being used in therapy. Denise humorously said that there'd be a lot less murders if we taught everyone to knit. It was notable that only a small amount of conversation, other than when I asked direct questions, was actually about

the technical aspects of their knitting. They made small enquiries about what each other was working on, but conversation about other things took the majority of the time. The group all talked about knitting for other people. A couple talked about knitting for their children when they were younger and now knitting for their grandchildren. At this point Alice intervened and said that it depended who you were because she did not have children so she tended to knit for herself or as presents for friends. She was working on something that 'would do as a Christmas present', indicating that she did not always have someone in mind when knitting a particular project. The group also knitted for charity, particularly Edna who knitted tea cosies for a cancer charity and said that the group had sponsored her to take part in a 'moon walk' event.

A small section of the discussion was devoted to the difference in quality of handmade and shop-bought knitted items. Denise said that for this reason her mother had knitted for Denise's children when they were babies. Her mother had died when the children were only two and she had suddenly noticed the difference in quality of the shop-bought items she was forced to purchase. Denise had then learnt to knit and had not stopped since.

When a member asked me about my background and I mentioned a fine art undergraduate Beatrice was quick to say that the group had all agreed they did not like it when people covered things like trees in knitting. They said it was a waste in yarn, often not skilful, graffiti, and wondered who cleaned it up. They seemed to place a value on skill and not wasting yarn or time.

The knitting group members discussed looking forward to attending each week and Edna said she could get help from 'the experts', indicating Beatrice and Denise. Edna also said her sister was desperate to find a similar group near where she lived as Edna was always saying 'at the knitting group we talked about this or that...'. They chose which projects to bring to the group carefully as they didn't want something so tricky that they had to concentrate and 'miss out on the gossip'. The group talked about getting home and realising they had made mistakes that needed to be unpicked because they had been distracted by conversation.

As the group were packing up Denise said she had attended a different knitting group once but had left quickly as she had not liked it. She was searching for how to say why and Beatrice suggested they were 'snobby', but she settled on 'competitive'. There was a feeling of pride that their knitting group was not like that, particularly from Beatrice who seemed to take a leading position within the group. I felt it was important to them that they were seen to be welcoming and accommodating, in contrast to the other group. I don't know whether this was partly due to the location of the library, a public building which was allowing access and refreshments for free, or a reflection on the group members, or a quality of knitting more generally. That a member had experienced a different atmosphere suggests not all groups are like this one, and perhaps people attend for reasons other than support.

Appendix 2.1.3 Type of conversation

Throughout the session the women seemed happy to switch between talking about knitting, sometimes with prompts from me and sometimes at their own instigation, and other topics. They spoke in an uninhibited way which made me feel like they were not too disturbed by my presence. I was made to feel temporarily part of their group. There was little discussion of knitting techniques which surprised me, although the women did say they attended so they could ask advice when stuck and Edna said she had been taught how to read patterns when she first attended the group, so perhaps this happened just not during this meeting. Beatrice talked me through what she was making. She seemed proud of it and also generous in her taking me through how it was put together.

Beatrice broke off from conversation with the group to help two teenagers who were using needles and wool that seemed to be stored at the library for the use of the group. They only stayed about five minutes. A couple of other teenagers came and talked to Edna about their schoolwork, and another member explained to me that she was a teacher, so presumably these were her students. In the middle of a capital city I was struck by how her pupils could see their teacher in her spare time and be friendly and comfortable with her. The knitting group being in a library may give it the feeling of being a part of the local community.

Carmen spent some time talking about a family tree she was working on, and said she wanted to get it printed before anyone else was born or died. She

said she had lots of babies in the family to knit for. There was a short discussion after this of finding out family secrets and a couple of members talked about how their parents or grandparents were from different areas and so were not meant to see each other, but married anyway. There was a distinct Scottish theme in their discussion of family history. There was a conversation about invasions of privacy, whether via 'Facebook', the internet or cold callers. The women felt their homes were private spaces and resented being contacted via phone or email. They were suspicious of the internet and felt that people could get their email address or phone number if they browsed on certain sites. They talked about personal experiences rather than general abstract notions of privacy.

The main conversation was relating to a power cut that had happened during the day in the area. The women talked about their house alarms, about the television turning off and about hearing sirens. The group seemed to have shared knowledge. They referred to people outside the group by their first names who were presumably husbands and children. They seemed to know some of each other's personal circumstances such as where they lived and what their jobs were. They often did not explain to me who or where they were talking about. This made me feel like they had accepted me into the group and were not recognising my position as an outsider.

Carmen spoke least in the group discussions and concentrated more on her knitting. The others spoke fairly easily and freely, and knitted throughout.

Beatrice was more vocal than others and sometimes put her knitting down in order to focus on conversation. She sometimes prompted others or spoke for

them. However, the group seemed to work well like this and I did not sense resentment or antagonism about her assuming a leadership role. I think she seemed the more experienced knitter apart from Carmen who was quieter. The group expressed concern for Carmen and they made someone escort her across the road at the end of the evening. The women showed respect and sympathy towards each other, rarely interrupted, and only a few times was there multiple conversations happening as opposed to a group conversation. This may have been different had there been more people attending or I had not been there.

Appendix 2.1.4 Positioning myself in relation to research participants

I was nervous to meet the group and stumbled through a short introduction. This was not the impressive pitch I had prepared. Throughout the session I did not feel how I expected to. I did not feel in control or like 'a researcher'. Whilst I would have liked to have felt more confident, or perhaps if I am honest more powerful, on reflection I realise that I have to make a choice about what role I want to play in relation to research participants. I did not take on an authoritative role and the group seemed comfortable and easy in my presence. My attendance at the session led to me being incorporated so much into the group that I left to assurances that 'you will come again won't you', 'we can be your guinea pigs for your research', 'you must come back but only if you bring your knitting' etc. Taking on a relaxed approach had

resulted in, I feel, more naturalistic conversation and a more welcoming and open response from the group.

I have had experience of talking and working with people from different backgrounds or different age groups than me and have always found it came naturally and was enjoyable. However, in this situation, perhaps as I was nervous and not sure what to expect - I felt young and inexperienced. I think this was to do with my confidence and could be solved by reconsidering how I want to position myself in relation to research participants and so redefining what I felt a 'successful' attitude would be. This experience has lead me to think about what I want my role as enquirer to be and how best to collect information. Whilst my ego might benefit from directing conversation, taking an 'insider' approach instead might make people feel most comfortable and therefore produce richer responses.

An unexpected result of the session was that I felt like I really wanted to make things and to join the group. I found the atmosphere friendly and comfortable and regretted not taking anything to knit with me. Having gone through a long period of not feeling creative, my hands were itching to knit and sew again. I have spent the last six months concentrating on reading around my PhD topic and had not felt I had the headspace or confidence to be creative. After having a turning point in my research and being creative in formulating a research question and shaping a literature review draft and some methodological decisions I feel like I have turned a corner outside my research as well. I had not previously considered how my research might affect me and my state of mind and vice versa. It was good for me to feel

welcomed into the group and will give me a confidence that I can take into my next research stages.

I had assumed that people would want to think and talk about why they made textiles. At least I had assumed if they were willing to talk to me generally that I could ask them about their motivations and they would be willing to tell me. Whilst the group were on the whole willing to open to talking to me there was one comment which made me think again about my assumption. Beatrice said 'well I've never really analysed it, I just do it' with what seemed like a slight tinge of resentment at being asked. I picked up from couple of the group that they had not thought about why they knitted before and were puzzled at me asking them. They said that they often knit to relax and *not* to think. Perhaps having to think about it, in a time when they are usually talking about other things with the group was intrusive or inappropriate. If knitting is an intuitive process, part of creative 'flow', or caring, productive instinct, perhaps thinking, 'analysing' or articulating this is inappropriate, difficult or uncomfortable. It is therefore important for me to consider situations in which my questioning would be least intrusive.

Appendix 2.1.5 Summary of Focus Group

The pilot was useful for both the insights generated about reasons for knitting alone and as part of a group and for raising issues about positioning and how to collect rich data. The group's discussion included personal satisfaction at feeling productive and also avoiding the guilt or uncomfortable feeling of

inactivity. They spoke differently of knitting alone, which they went through periods of being 'addicted' to, to the extent of sacrificing sleep and damaging their hands; and choosing knitting which allowed them to concentrate on group conversation when attending the session. The group seemed to have shared knowledge, speak about personal experiences, and have a united attitude towards knitting and a pride at their attitude towards other people. I will need to consider how to make participants feel most comfortable and safe through the location I speak to them (should it be where they normally knit, at home or in public for example), the role I take in the activity (the degree to which I prompt conversation or access naturally occurring conversation), the way I record the conversation (a dictaphone may be more or less intrusive than notes), and whether they are alone or in a group or both.

Appendix 2.2 Textual analysis of secondary data

This section discusses the second part of the pilot study which explored the possibility of analysis existing texts. The first part involved looking at five blogs written by women who made textiles and the second an instructional knitting book. This was aimed at testing the viability of using pre-existing data and to generate some initial broad themes that women associate with their textile production. The process of analysing these texts involved a loose content analysis procedure involving noting key themes based on their significance and frequency. The codes here are similar to Saldana's (2013:87) descriptive codes in that they represent a basic level engagement with the data and reflect topic more than meaning. This is intended only as a pilot study and therefore it is recognised that this is a brief engagement with a small sample.

Appendix 2.2.1 Blog scope

A randomly selected blog led me to 'Crafty Magazine's' blog tour and so a sample was taken from these blogs based on the assumption that they must be popular in order to have been included. The 'about me' section of each blog was analysed for content and brief thoughts on the visual appearance and the rest of the blog was also noted. In order to capture my first impressions and test these ideas within a short timeframe the time spent on

each blog was limited to ten minutes. Each blog, 'about me' section, and my notes are discussed in turn below before summarising key themes in the concluding section.

Blog 1 – Did you make that? (n.d.): This blogger reflects on the process of writing and motivations for blogging, but not the process of making or what she makes. Although the blog is virtual and could be anonymous she and her readers have met through an event she organised, likewise she says she has gained online and real friends through blogging. The contents of the blog are mainly factual, for example she recommends particular sewing machines. She mentions that if someone can't buy one they could ask their friends as someone is 'bound' to have one 'gathering dust'. This implies a community aspect to making. She asks readers specific questions at the end of one post, inviting them to comment. This makes me feel like she has a connection with her readers and values their opinions. There is a giveaway for readers, making the blog seem friendly and professional at the same time. She has brought out her own e-book after a testing process. This again increases the site's professionalism, and makes me feel like I could trust her to teach me something. The blog has a little content not related to sewing such as exercise or the weather.

The author does not refer to anyone else other than briefly to a couple of students she teaches. She does not refer to making with anyone else, but does discuss how she will talk about making skirts at a class she is taking, and making a baby blanket for a pregnant friend (at their request). She refers to the BBC's 'Great British Sewing Bee' saying that she thinks we are 'in the

midst of a sewing...revolution', and that the book tie-in could be more creative in line with this 'revolution'. She specifically mentions her approval of the BBC including a range of contestants of different ages, locations and classes, although acknowledges this could be interpreted as 'tokenism'. It's not clear if she thinks that the range is reflective of sewers generally. The blog looks good, is well photographed, many including her, and is professional. The style is chatty but focused.

Blog 2 – My happy sewing place (n.d.) : The 'about' section introduces herself in terms of nationality, home location and relationships. She has a chatty, informal style and invites comments from readers. There is a brief mention of her career as a 'researcher'. Later in the blog she refers to developing a Masters programme relating to child protection. She apologises for using the blog to get people's thoughts on the Masters and says she'll only refer to sewing in the future. She writes about being given a dress by a colleague who knew she could use it to make something. The author is in almost all of the photos to illustrate the clothes she makes. She also refers to making clothes for her husband. The main theme of the blog is historical clothing from around 1940. Some of the writing is focused on specific skills, for example she tracks the design feature of tucks through time using dress patterns.

Blog 3 – House of pinheiro (n.d.): Referring to a 'creative journey' in her 'about' section makes me feel like I would be learning along with her. The photo shoots look like they are from fashion magazines and she makes things which look more like fashion than craft. The writing is reflective, like a

formal diary. Visually it has an artsy look created with hand drawn illustrations and quirky fonts. She talks about making presents for her mum and nephew. There are lots of mentions of meeting up with readers and other bloggers. For example, she 'hosts' an American blogger for a few hours in London and invites readers to email her if they want to come along and meet them. There are competitions to win items she makes and this again makes it feel interactive. There are also lots of mentions of other blogs and a guest blogger. She speaks of meeting up with bloggers she has 'long admired', like they are friends but also celebrities.

Blog 4 – Handmade Jane (2013): This blog has detailed descriptions of dressmaking and patterns. The 'about' section is a little apologetic for the time she spends making things and ends with saying that when not doing this she is a mum to her sons moving the focus from herself to her family. There are lots of other bloggers mentioned, whether she is testing patterns for them or looking at what they've made with the same pattern she is using. This seems like a technical sewer's blog as the writing is focused and technical, reflecting on the adjustments made and success of various features. She admits feeling like a 'stalker' seeing another blogger make something and then wanting to copy. There is one mention of making something for a friend, otherwise she makes clothes for herself. There is one post which ends with a question to readers. She mentions other bloggers without explaining who they are, it is not clear whether this is because she assumes her audience will know them, or because inserting a hyperlink means the reader can easily click and find out themselves from their blog.

Blog 5 – Peas and needles (Davidson, 2015): No ‘about’ section but links to a range of social media sites and to a separate site with a design portfolio. She refers to life goals which include making things, travel and health. This blog is not just textiles but also paper craft and design. She talks about a holiday with friends. The blog is semi-professional, for example she was sent some items from Argos to photograph in her home for their adverts. She includes artists that inspire her. There is a reference to wanting her own place instead of renting that she can make her own. There is one post which ends with a question. This website seems more design orientated than about making things and there is more distance put between herself and the reader by being less like a diary and using more ‘professional’ language like ‘design’ and ‘portfolio’.

Appendix 2.2.2 Instructional book thematic analysis

In order to test the potential of using instructional knitting books as data and to contribute to an initial broad thematic scoping an analysis of a book was included in the pilot. A ‘convenience sample’, a sample selected because it is easy to reach (Patton, 2010). Greer’s (2008) *Knitting for Good* was chosen at random from those held in the Edinburgh College of Art library. I read the whole book once before re-reading and noting the themes that seemed to appear most, loosely following a content analysis procedure. The key themes identified for discussion below relate to the aesthetic of the book, knitting and

autonomy, creating connections with oneself and with others, women and knitting, and the relationship between the author and the readership.

The paperback book can be held easily in one hand. Its size means it stands out from the other knitting books in the library which tend to be A4 or larger.

The font is a little quirky and chapter headings are not capitalised which makes it feel 'arty'. The white cover looks modern and has connotations with morality. There is an image of the world on the cover which makes me think of environmental issues and that the book will talk about linking people around the world, and perhaps challenge the anonymity of globalisation.

There are several references to craft or knitting as autonomous, for example: 'expanding your relationship with craft', 'set it free', and 'it found me' (Greer, 2008:4, 5, 9). There is also some reference to a lack of choice over the decision on the author's part to knit, for example: 'some people are meant to donate their time, knowledge', and 'I couldn't *not* do something' (Greer, 2008:2, 3). Craft and creativity are something to be 'taken...in hand' as if they might get out of control (Greer, 2008:5). This seems to imply that everyone has these abilities and that it is about learning to both control and set free creativity.

Knitting as a way to connect with your true self was a key theme in the book. This is presented as both a connection to a pre-existing identity, for example 'personal connection to your creativity', and also enabling you to shape your identity into something new, for example 'explore my own creativity and identity' and 'literally "craft my life"' (Greer, 2008:4, 10, 12). Greer implies that

there are things that we can discover about ourselves and also things we can decide about ourselves through knitting. Greer also mentions other benefits of knitting such as relaxation and being in the present rather than thinking about the past or future. The distinction between what one makes and who one is becomes blurred; 'it can become part of your everyday life, your personality and your beliefs' (Greer, 2008:30). Greer (2008) writes about not feeling part of a community until she started knitting and this gave her the confidence to take risks and make changes in her life. Continuing a theme of self-improvement Greer (2008:9) uses metaphors such as 'when we explore our craft roots, we can connect more deeply' and knitting as a 'journey'. There is a sense that knitting is about locating oneself in the present but also as part of a progression into the future in which you hopefully will 'grow' (Greer, 2008:144). Perhaps this is into a better person or into a lifestyle which we feel has a better 'fit' with our aspirations.

In addition to knitting connecting us to our identities, the author uses sensual language which could suggest knitting can also connect ourselves to our bodies. Greer (2008 :11) describes the experience of being in a yarn shop as

enticing and intensely personal...There was something alluring about the needles...I found myself simultaneously intrigued and confused...touching and pawing a fraction of the various yarns...I was hit with the reality that it was tactile stimulation I had been missing. So often we are told not to touch...it almost felt sinful to get my hands on so many different items that weren't made of metal or plastic.

The author draws the reader in by describing the yarn shop as full of things to be touched. It is interesting that she notes that it felt 'sinful' as if enjoying the yarns purely for their tactile qualities was too much of a luxury that perhaps the author felt selfish.

As well as connecting to or growing into our identities, Greer (2008) also writes about knitting as a way to connect with other people. Greer (2008:4) compares the act of making to the act of touching and the gift of a handmade object a way of touching and showing care which can bridge cultural taboos and physical distance, 'connecting with family, friends, and others in your community'. She says that craft can 'transcend societal differences... you can still let your stitches do the talking' (Greer, 2008:5). This implies that handmade objects have a universal understanding which does not require a shared language or cultural knowledge. Greer (2008:12) also suggests that knitting can link us with people from the past, we can 'learn about the daily experience of the millions of women who have taken up their needles before me... [and] connect with women of previous generations'. This comes with a responsibility, according to the author, to ensure people continue to knit, knitters should 'pass this skill on to others, as we dovetail history with the future' (Greer, 2008:19). By passing on skills knitting is both about connecting to the past and future, 'our crafts may live longer than we do...connecting generations' (Greer, 2008:19). Another way that knitting can connect people is through activism and ethical beliefs according to Greer (2008). The author describes knitting as a 'common denominator' which

brought together and enabled discussion between varied groups of people, for example at knitting groups (Greer, 2008:2).

Greer (2008) considers how knitting was considered women's work and dismissed as menial, before considering the rejection of feminine crafts by second wave feminists and the recent adoption of domestic activities again as a feminist decision. There are repeated references to creating new associations between women and craft, for example,

crafts such as knitting are being embraced and reclaimed by a new generation; we have the power to redefine *handmade* and all the baggage that may come with it...in a way that better reflects current views of feminism and domesticity (Greer, 2008:14).

Greer refers to replacing stereotypical associations of textile production such as women being 'mild-mannered' 'by making the domestic a source of pride and strength' (Greer, 2008:19). Greer encourages women to redefine knitting and 'honour' knitters from the past. This is something of a manifesto and call to arms. Greer (2008) reaches out to the audience using collective terms such as 'we'. Throughout the book there is a strong feminist influence which can be seen in the frequent repetition of terms such as choice and empowerment, for example 'we can be empowered by the notion that we are self-sufficient and *choosing* this path instead of following society's expectations', and 'we can choose to re-enter our kitchens' (Greer, 2008:26, 18).

The book seems aimed at people who are receptive to the idea of making things, or even already knit, for example the second chapter ends with asking the reader about their interest in craft and assumes they are already making things. The author may be attempting to shape their knitting in a way that best benefits them and those around them, but that also considers how it could be used to reach more widely and charitably. Although not made explicit the book is clearly aimed at women. There is no reference to men who knit and the book refers to 'women's work' as a contemporary umbrella term for knitting and other activities such as cooking associated with femininity, as well as a historical one. I find it interesting that the author does not mention men who knit, as it seems to weaken her case the resignification of the handmade. If it is still 'women's work' then it has not been completely reworked, rather it still holds some of its old meanings.

Appendix 2.2.3 Summary of textual analysis of secondary data

Analysing pre-existing data has been useful in quickly and easily gaining an initial impression of some key themes such as the community that exists between bloggers and how this extends into meeting each other in-person and how women often talk about family members in their blog posts.

Bloggers tended to speak to their audience as if they were knowledgeable about both making textiles and the online community they felt part of.

Although spending more time analysing the blogs is likely to result in more detailed findings, it was frustrating not to be able to question the research

subjects further and I was conscious the writing was tailored towards specific audiences and therefore partial. The bloggers were, by nature of the blog, presenting themselves and their work publicly, whereas the knitting group were talking more openly and less self-consciously in the semi-private context.

The book has several core themes including developing an identity in relation to the past (learning and honouring the skills of previous generations of women), present (creating a meditative, relaxed and inward looking state of mind) and the future (leaving both physical objects and skills for future generations). An additional theme was the extent to which knitting facilitated or mediated relationships, with oneself, with those in one's locality, and with a global community (for example through charity) . Knitting and making things by hand are presented as a 'language' which can communicate across temporal, spatial and cultural boundaries.

Appendix 2.3 Interview and pre-defined coding schemes

The third part of the pilot study consisted of an interview with a female knitter living in Edinburgh. This knitter was chosen as, after hearing me talk about the research at an unrelated event, she expressed interest in participating. Conducting an interview as part of the pilot was aimed at generating initial themes to inform the subsequent data collection, test the viability of collecting data through interviewing, and explore the use of a pre-defined coding scheme derived from existing literature. The analysis used hypothesis coding

(Saldana, 2013:147). From previous experience and a scope of existing literature it was hypothesised that knitting was involved in women's process of identity construction and communication. Therefore, theoretical model mapping different types of knowledge was chosen derived from Belenkey et al. (1986).

Appendix 2.3.1 Women's ways of knowing coding scheme

This analysis was based on Belenky et al.'s (1986) 'educational dialectics'. When discussing the meaning of making textiles and textiles themselves pairs of terms which seem apposed frequently crop up such as necessity and luxury, practicality and frivolity, tradition and innovation, obligation and agency, conformity and creativity etc. In previous research I found that making textiles was often used in British folk tales to represent values that could be grouped into pairs that were associated with women, including beauty and modesty, chastity and fecundity, and innocence and responsibility. These could be described using the term binary pairs or dualisms to, however this implies they are discrete and opposite, instead the terms are placed on a continuum. Relevant data from the interview was sorted under these categories and summarised below to explore what types of knowledge Abigail used in her knitting.

Process orientated (means) ↔ goal orientated (ends)

- Process is a ritual
- Learns through doing
- Motivated by the joy of the process
- Enjoys compliments on final piece
- Enjoys wearing knitting for herself

Discovery (constructed knowledge) ↔ didacticism (received knowledge)

- Taking risks and trying things without knowing for sure how they will look
- Will look things up if get stuck
- Will undo and retry mistakes but only up to a point

Rational (logical, analytical, objective) ↔ intuitive (gut feeling, subjective)

- Very analytical when reflecting on why she knits
- Yarn selection and experiencing the knitting

Discrete (compartmentalised) ↔ related (synthesis)

- Project based approach
- Specific time and place to knit
- However knitting is very much part of her synthesised identity

Being with others ↔ being on own

- It is a private activity but one through which she connects to others through conversation and with the past, particularly women from the past. However, it is not part of her social life. Perhaps a little more part of family life.

Breadth (general, broad interests) ↔ concentration (specialist)

- She is a specialist and would like to go through the whole process of this specialism from sheep to jumper.

Support ↔ challenge (as optimal conditions for learning, and how would define supportive)

No data identified – further questioning needed

Personal ↔ impersonal (relationship between self and learning and self and others)

- She has a close connection to her knitting

Self concern ↔ responsibility and caring for others

- She was not embarrassed to say that she knits for herself
- Although in some stories she mentioned other people she was usually central
- Can be more creative when for herself
- Located events in relation to family members
- Although said didn't often make for others she did a few times mention doing so
- There's a risk in making for others

Inner ↔ outer (influence on goal setting, evaluation, what/who is validating)

No data identified – further questioning needed

Listening ↔ speaking ('what are the experiences of voice?')

No data identified – further questioning needed

Appendix 2.3.2 Simple coding of pilot interview

A simple descriptive code of the interview transcript using QSR*NVivo resulted in the following categories and questions. These helped shape the questionnaires used in Stage 2.

1. Connection with other women

- Why does knitting (versus other activities) have the power to link/form connections with other knitters (past and present, known and collective 'women')? Is it because it is such a traditional activity?
- Do women who knit feel it 'binds' them to other knitters? Are knitters different from non-knitters? Is there an 'us and them' culture? Is knitting inclusive or exclusive?
- Does knitting fulfil a 'social need' in women/people/ women's leisure activities? Is this more so/less so/ different in the context of technologically mediated social spaces, globalisation, fragmentation? Are we really any different?
- How can an individual activity be communal/ collective/ reference collective or shared experience? Is it both private and public? Do knitters feel they share an experience?

2. Emotional attachment to knitting, equipment, yarn and knitted objects

- When does this form in the skill level, process? How do women feel about their equipment? The space they make in? Stash? How do others feel about the same things/ about the knitter's feelings towards these things?

- How can you 'love' something inanimate? What do you get from it?

Does time invested develop bond? How does this interact/relate/ effect/ exist in parallel to bonds with other people?

3. Joy of pattern, texture, process, satisfaction

- Knitting is (largely) joyful, after all it is a choice and leisure activity, but this is not often really mentioned – lost in over theorising? Not possible to theorise? Not interesting? Surface level? Overlooked?
- Is the joy inhibited/ uninhibited/ guilty/ prioritised/ fought for/ freely given by others?
- The satisfaction in finishing – is this an aesthetic/ functional/ classed etc. decision? Does finishing seem like an achievement? Based on time and skill investment? Based on the 'labour'?
- Why is the process so important as well as end result/ more than end result/ contributed to value of end result?
- What is the value of women's leisure time? To themselves/ to others/ to society?

4. Making things for others/ self

- This interviewee was unusual in prioritising making for herself. Was this more honesty than others/ different priorities/ she was less inhibited by other people or society's expectations/ about her profession or career or stage in life?

5. Memory

- Life story in knitting, giving status/ authority/ pride?
- Does muscle memory free up mind, allow to do other things – advantage for women or symptom of women's blurred lines between leisure and roles?

6. Need and ritual

- Getting carried away is a chance to be impractical, experiment with rules? Guilt free
- Addiction – wouldn't describe men's hobbies this way? Important or even vital to them? How's it different if it's just a small part of life?
- Part of identity alongside other things – how does knitting 'sit' with rest of identity? How do other people think it 'sits'?
- Ritual – do others use knitting as a ritual, is space and time important? Does it change mood? Is repetition important?
- Not part of social life – is she unusual? Is knitting both private and public?

7. Other

- Cost – indicates importance?
- Sense of place/ authenticity/ grounding – localism
- 'Labour of love' why choose something difficult to do in leisure time? Why need mental challenge in leisure? Or is it worth it for rewards? Or is it part of the reward? Is this a part of serious leisure? Society's

expectations of women as productive or way of establishing knitting as not frivolous or simple or low value?

Appendix 2.3.3 Summary of pilot interview

This section of the pilot was most rewarding in terms of the depth of interrogation achieved and the ability to question the participant to clarify specific points. As discussed in the main body of the thesis, Section 3.3.1, applying a hypothesis driven and pre-defined coding scheme to the data was useful in generating initial ideas but it was decided that this was at the expense of responding to what was actually in the data in detail. Using a coding scheme shaped and restricted the analysis too soon in the process. This stage was influential in the decision to take a grounded theory approach. The interview resulted in a number of questions which were explored in Stage 2 and 3.

Appendix 3 Stage 3 documents

Appendix 3.1 Recruitment leaflet

I am interested in why women knit and what part it plays in their lives



As a knitter myself, I'm doing this research as part of a PhD at Edinburgh University. I would like to interview as many women as possible to ask about why they knit and what memories of knitting they have.

If you would be interested in being interviewed or would like more information I would love to talk to you. I can be contacted at:

k.m.lampitt-adey@sms.ed.ac.uk

Many Thanks,

Kate Lampitt Adey

Appendix 3.2 Information sheet and consent form

Why Do Women Make Textiles?

Kate Lampitt Adey, University of Edinburgh

Information Sheet

Please take a few moments to read this information and ask me if you would like anything clarified or have any concerns. Please keep the information sheet for your records.

If you have any queries or concerns after the interview please contact me via email at: k.m.lampitt-adey@sms.ed.ac.uk

The Research

This interview is part of my doctoral research project at the University of Edinburgh which runs between September 2012 and September 2015. The project aims to better understand the role that making textiles plays in women's lives in Britain today. The interview will be about 1 hour, but you can stop at any time. I may contact you to speak to you again, but you are free to withdraw from the research at any time or turn down further contact.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The recordings, notes and transcripts generated during and after interviews will be password protected and stored on a private computer. As part of the data analysis process hard copies of anonymised transcripts may be discussed with the doctoral supervision team and colleagues but will remain in my possession at all times.

I will ask you for some personal details. The participant is free to not give any or all of these details should they wish. All information will be anonymised.

The research will result in a thesis which will be publicly accessible.

Throughout the course of the PhD and after completion parts of the research may be published or delivered as talks. Anonymised quotes, with any identifying features removed, may be used in any of these.



Consent Form

Please tick the columns and sign at the bottom of the page to give your consent to participate.

	Yes	No
I understand what the research is about		
I have had the opportunity to ask and have answered my questions about the research		
I am willing to be interviewed by Kate Lampitt Adey		
I agree for the interview to be written down, and digitally recorded and transcribed		
I understand that no-one will access recordings other than the researcher and that all data will be password protected		
I understand that transcripts of the interview may be discussed with colleagues and supervisors as part of the analysis procedure		
I understand that comments will be anonymised in the thesis, and any publications and talks		
I understand that I may end the interview or withdraw from the research at any point		

Name of participant:.....

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Name of researcher: Kate Lampitt Adey

Signature:

.....

If you would like to receive a summary of the research after it is completed
please tick here and provide an email or postal address

☐

Email

address:.....

.....

Postal

address:.....

.....

If you feel comfortable please indicate your age range and occupation (leave
blank if you would prefer):

18-24 ☐

25-34 ☐

35 -44 ☐

45-54 ☐

55-64 ☐

65+ ☐

Occupation:.....

Appendix 3.3 Interview schedule

Explain I'm interested in why women knit, as a knitter. Recording, transcribing, analysing. Offer transcript/ things take out.

Section A – Part of who I am

1. When did you learnt to knit and why?
 2. Do you do any other crafts/ artwork?
 3. Are there any knitting projects that you particularly remember?
 - a. your first
 - b. a successful one
 - c. a difficult one
 - d. something you are
most proud of
-
- a. describe it to me
 - b. did you/they wear/use it
 - c. why does that stick in
your memory

Section 2 – Work and leisure

1. When and where do you tend to knit?
 - a. Do you knit whilst doing other things – waiting, travelling, talking or watching television?
 - b. Could you knit in any circumstances?
2. Do you set aside time for knitting? Is time for knitting a priority for you?
 - a. How do you feel about time spent knitting
3. Do you have a 'stash' waiting for you to use? Do you have several projects on the go at once? How do you feel about your stash and UFO's (unfinished objects)?

Section 3 – Joy of Making

1. Do you find knitting satisfying? Why?
2. Do you use knitting to change your mood/ does it change your mood?
3. How do you choose a pattern?
 - a. Do you like to be challenged by a pattern?
4. What are the best and worst bits of a knitting project?
5. Do you ever adjust a pattern?

Section 5 – Connections, gender and generation

1. Are you part of a knitting group or knit with other people?
 - a. If yes, then why?
 - b. If no, have you considered joining?

2. Is knitting part of your social life?
3. Is the history of knitting important to you?
4. Does knitting ever come up in day to day conversations?
5. Do you describe yourself as a 'knitter'? What does this mean to you?
 - a. What kind of knitter
 - b. Do you ever identify with someone else as 'knitters'? Do you think there's anything that knitters tend to have in common?
6. In terms of the media and general public how do you think knitting is portrayed?
7. Do you ever give what you make as gifts?

If yes:

- a. Do you think handmade gifts have more value than shop bought?
- b. How do you feel about the time you've spent making something that you then give away?

If no:

- a. Do you tend to make things for yourself?
- b. Are these special to you?

What motivated you to contact me and volunteer to be part of the research?

Is there anything else you'd like to mention or return to?

If you'd like anything taken out of the transcript...

Thank you...

Appendix 3.4 Coding tree for initial codes

1. Art or craft?
2. Barriers to knitting
a. Conflicting interests
b. Lack of patterns or yarn
c. No children to knit for
d. Not cool
3. Best bits
a. Anticipation of next project
b. Finishing
c. Giving to others
d. Making
e. Preparation
f. Showing other people
g. Specific technique
h. Starting
i. Taking shape
4. Class
5. Confidence
a. Assessing my knitting or my ability (negative)
b. Assessing my knitting or my ability (positive)
c. Confidence in acquiring new skills (lack of)
d. Confidence in acquiring new skills (positive)
e. I have to be good before I can give people my knitting
6. Control
7. Creativity
a. I couldn't modify or design a pattern
b. I'm not 'creative'
c. Knitting doesn't or doesn't always require skill or creativity
d. Knitting is or can be creative
8. Empowering
9. Wanting others to join knitting community
10. Family
a. Connecting family members
b. Family stories
c. I grew up with mum or grandmother knitting
d. Mum or grandmother knitted for me
e. Part of my heritage, genetic or social
11. Favourite projects
a. Complexity or size
b. Effectiveness
c. First project
d. Gift
e. Not my best knitting but... (not measured by skill level)
f. People comment upon it
g. Significance and memories
h. I learnt the most from it
12. Gender
a. Knitting is seen as feminine (but it shouldn't)

b. Knitting is seen as feminine (no judgement)
c. Men and knitting
d. Women are better suited to knitting than men
13. General perception of knitting
a. Don't value it or understand it's time or financial cost
b. I couldn't do that
c. Impressed, intrigued
d. Portrayed as new, young and fashionable
e. Simple and chunky
f. Stereotypes about knitters
14. Guilt
15. History of knitting
a. Passing interest
b. Sense of continuity, looking back and forwards
c. To learn about women's experiences
d. To learn from, practical interest
16. How I feel about the time I spend knitting
a. 'addicted', 'need', compulsion
b. Chore
c. Miss it when don't knit
d. Don't miss it when don't knit
e. Hobby, leisure
f. Luxury, not just time
g. Work - chore or would do anyway
17. How I knit
a. Choosing a pattern
b. Deadlines
c. Designing
d. Enjoyment of process over product
e. Hurrying, want to be finished, want to start next thing
f. Mistakes or not liking something
g. Modifications
h. Motivation - keeping it or regaining it
i. Multiple projects
j. Perfectionism
k. Planning - organised
l. Planning - pattern or wool first
m. Planning - spontaneous
n. UFO's
18. Knitters on other knitters
a. Charity knitting
b. Disliking what they've made
c. Fashion fad knitters, stitch n' bitch knitters etc.
d. Knitting in public
e. Old fashioned knitters
f. Yarn bombing
19. Knitting for myself
20. Knitting gifts

- a. Balance between knitting for self and others
- b. Examples of handmade gifts
- c. How I feel about the gift, the time spent on the gift
- d. Potential issues with handmade gifts
- e. Reasons to give handmade

21. Learning

- a. Family member taught me
- b. Influential person
- c. Learnt at school
- d. Motivations to learn or re-learn
 - i. Boredom, fill time, spare time
 - ii. Change in circumstances or roles effecting knitting
 - iii. Encounter with knitting or with someone who knitted
 - iv. For specific characteristics
 - v. New technique
 - vi. New yarns
 - vii. Seeing family member knit
 - viii. To be creative
 - ix. To make clothes for myself
- e. Taught myself
- f. Workshops and classes as an adult

22. 'Levels' of knitting

23. Motivations

- a. Accessible, in terms of practicality and skill
- b. 'an object means far more...than mass produced'
- c. Anti-materialist
- d. Challenge, progression, new things to try, problem solving
- e. Colour, texture and pattern
- f. Distract myself from something I don't want to do or that is boring
- g. Doing something other people can see
- h. Family continuity, recapture childhood
- i. Flexibility and scope
- j. Focus my attention
- k. For the end product
- l. Get a better work-life balance
- m. Happy
- n. It's a skill
- o. Just something I do
- p. Not be idle
- q. Personal space
- r. Productive with a physical output
- s. Quality of end product
- t. Satisfying and fulfilling
- u. Save money
- v. Something creative and different to the rest of my life
- w. Something that combines intellectual and physical action
- x. The physical experience
- y. Therapeutic qualities

z. Time for myself or luxury for myself
aa. To give things for people
bb. To make something to be used
cc. Unique, personalised to me
24. Non-knitting friends and family
a. Don't talk about it with non-knitting friends
b. Impact on friends and family members
c. Knitting with non-knitters
d. People don't remark upon my hand knitted items
e. Polite interest, surface conversation
f. Receiving comments or compliments
g. They are impressed
25. Not enjoyable bits of knitting
a. Boring because big or repetitive
b. Finishing
c. Finishing steps
d. Frustration with oneself
e. Frustration with pattern
f. Maths
g. Not making progress with a project
h. Stressful
26. Other making or activities
a. Impact of knitting on other areas of life
b. Knitting could be replaced with other things
c. Other things I do
27. Part of who I am
28. Place
29. Popularity now
30. Pride
31. Research related
a. Comments on research
b. Have given consideration before interview begins
c. Interviewee's questions
d. Surprise at what we talked about
e. Why volunteered?
i. Interest in what others say
ii. Interested in what they would say
iii. Some connection previously to research
iv. Wanted to talk to someone who was interested in knitting
32. Social knitting
a. Attending knitting groups
i. Don't know how I would meet other knitters other than knit group
ii. For motivation
iii. Meet different people with different experiences
iv. Meet like-minded people
v. Nature of conversation
vi. Shy people
vii. Time set aside to knit

viii. Type of knitting done during group
b. Knitting community
c. Learn and share techniques
d. Levelling, uniting
e. Not wanting to knit socially
f. Something to do with other women
g. Support
h. The acceptability of knitting
33. Strangers are interested in public places
a. How the knitters feel about receiving this attention
b. I couldn't do that
c. Other Interest
d. Triggers memories
e. What are you making
34. Suited to knitting because...
a. 'I just have the facility for it'
b. Knitting fits with lifestyle choices
c. Technical, mathematical and engineering skills
35. Teaching
36. Wasting wool or wasting time
37. What it means to be a knitter
a. Being a knitter is about being technical
b. Being known as a knitter
c. Just someone who knits, not necessarily anything that unites people
d. 'knitters are a special kind of...people'
e. Status achieved by competency
38. When knit?
a. Any opportunity
b. At the cinema
c. At work
d. During talks and lectures
e. Evenings, winding down time, when jobs are done, watching TV
f. Fit it in around other things
g. On holiday
h. Other times at home
i. Out with friends
j. Part of my everyday life
k. Seasonal
l. Time conflicts that prevent knitting
m. Travelling
n. Waiting
o. When don't knit
39. Yarn and equipment and stash
a. Acrylic
b. Natural
c. Shopping habits
d. Stash

NB: Codes are not distinct and data may be coded into several categories

Appendix 3.5 Descriptive categories coding tree

1. Do you feel part of community?
a. Across time
b. Knitting with others can hinder knitting
c. Knitting with others is a motivation or time set aside to knit
d. Learn and share techniques
e. Levelling, uniting
f. Not wanting to knit socially
g. Something to do with other women
h. Support
i. The acceptability of knitting
2. How do you knit?
a. Changing or reclaiming identities
b. Guilt and reassurance from stash
c. Memories created during the production
d. 'proper' knitting
e. Spontaneity-planning, perfectionism-relaxed attitude
i. Choosing a pattern
ii. Mistakes or not liking something
iii. Perfectionism
iv. Planning - organised
v. Planning - pattern or wool first
vi. Planning - spontaneous
vii. UFO's
3. How good at knitting are you?
a. Assessing my knitting or my ability (negative)
b. Assessing my knitting or my ability (positive)
c. Confidence in acquiring new skills (lack of)
d. Confidence in acquiring new skills (positive)
e. I couldn't modify or design a pattern
f. I have to be good before I can give people my knitting
g. I'm not 'creative'
4. What does it mean to be a knitter?
a. Being known as a knitter by other people
b. Different people
c. Distinct type of person
d. Distinction based on skill
e. General perception of knitting
i. Admiration
ii. Fashion fad of the young
iii. Stereotypes about knitting being old-fashioned or kitsch
iv. Undervalued
5. When do you knit?
a. Avoiding idleness and fidgety fingers
i. Evenings, winding down time, when jobs are done, watching tv
ii. For the end product

iii.	Not be idle
iv.	Out with friends
v.	Productive with a physical output
b.	Filling spare time and any opportunity
i.	Any opportunity
ii.	At the cinema
iii.	At work
iv.	Distract myself from something I don't want to do or that is boring
v.	During talks and lectures
vi.	Fit it in around other things
vii.	Just something I do
viii.	On holiday
ix.	Other times at home
x.	Part of my everyday life (move how i feel poss)
xi.	Travelling
xii.	Waiting
6.	Who do you knit for?
a.	Balance between knitting for self and others
b.	Knitting for myself
c.	Knitting gifts
i.	How I feel about the gift, the time spent on the gift
ii.	Potential issues with handmade gifts
iii.	Reasons to give handmade
iv.	To give things to people as motivation
7.	Why do you knit?
a.	Accessible, in terms of practicality and skill
i.	Flexibility and scope
b.	Autonomy and control
i.	Personal space
ii.	Tangible results
c.	Time for myself or luxury for myself
d.	Challenge and progression
e.	Colour, texture and pattern
f.	Quality of end product
g.	Creativity
i.	Something creative and different to the rest of my life
ii.	Something that combines intellectual and physical action
h.	Functional product
i.	Ideals and lifestyle benefits
i.	Anti-materialist
ii.	Get a better work-life balance
iii.	Happy
iv.	Satisfying and fulfilling
v.	Save money
vi.	Therapeutic qualities

j.	Unique product
8.	Other
a.	Deadlines
b.	Designing
c.	Enjoyment of process over product
d.	Hurrying, want to be finished, want to start next thing
e.	Modifications
f.	Motivation - keeping it or regaining it
g.	Multiple projects
h.	Seasonal
i.	Time conflicts that prevent knitting
j.	When don't knit

NB: Codes are not distinct and data may be coded into several categories

Appendix 4 Audit trail documents

Appendix 4.1 Samples from research log

This section contains extracts from my research journal written during the first stages of analysing the interview data from Stage 3.

13th February 2014

Nearing the end of first stage of interviews, initial preliminary analysis.

Descriptive coding.

Interview 3 – lots on designing, didn't code but could return to data about how differently see use of time. Not sure it's relevant at this stage though

Not sure whether to put things in different categories or put everything into 'why I do it'. Decided at this stage to split when it seems to be distinctive, but when I ask them at the end to sum up, I'll put in why I do it to see what the main drivers that they highlight themselves are. I'll also put things here when they don't obviously fit in their own category, perhaps to split later. Might be interesting to see what they say over the course of the interview and then how they sum up at end and whether their understanding has changed during the interview.

Started a 'not sure' category for things that I want to think more about when I see them in the context of others, when it feels something significant but I'm not sure what they're actually saying.

What should I do with the bits where they are talking about techniques?

Going to put into knitting with others, knitting groups, friends and stranger conversations.

...

4th April 2014

After break for intensive transcribing I am now returning to QSR*NVivo to code with the intention of working for a week and then spending a week writing in preparation for my supervision which will present some 'findings' (in a working sense of the term).

I will aim to read through each interview and make some additional notes about shape etc. so then I'll have a combination of these for each interview:

1. The interview
2. My reflective notes after the interview
3. Notes done after transcription
4. Notes after looking at whole of the interview
5. Coding in QSR*NVivo

I will use multiple codes because something can have multiple meanings however I will guard against having this too much which might indicate my coding labels needed to be adjusted as didn't really reflect what was there.

Might start afresh and code all interviews in one go and in same process as it's been a while since I did the coding I've got and I think I could perhaps do things differently now, be a bit more careful and deliberate in coding if I had already done reflective notes etc. to get broad ideas of categories.

For each interview read through for:

- Things that stand out as perhaps unusual to this interview and I haven't thought of in my overall impression of the data (and might not figure strongly in QSR*NVivo coding)
- Order and keywords (I guess might loosely follow interview schedule but interesting to consider where doesn't and if they've led this conversation)
- Where they have shown me photos or knitting with/without being asked and when in the conversation

Start new lot of codes and use codes from my reflective notes. Using some nodes within others and will include a generic folder within each which includes data which needs to be further sorted or doesn't have a place yet. Actually, changed my mind and for this first read will keep it simple and do initial codes without sub-codes.

I want to look at how they talk about their knitting so code for talking about specific projects?

Sometimes in this first code for big categories I find I did need some specifics that kept coming up and didn't necessarily fit within another category, such as 'challenge' and 'creativity, skill and experience' and 'change mood' which I could have included under 'why knit' but tried to not use this category unless really stuck for where to put it as it was too vague to really be useful. Tried to stay quite descriptive and broad, e.g. might look at 'unique things' later in a more focused code, at present they are coded in how I knit or use/function type codes

7th April 2014

Realising things are overlapping and will need adjusting, for example lots of generation and family are about knitted gifts, so need more precise coding for these categories.

Doing 10 initial coding then returning to each and adjusting to develop more precise codes and then perhaps more analytic rather than descriptive.

Knitting for myself is often mentioned in comparison to knitting for other people so perhaps it would be better to have this together

...

9th April 2014

Rejigged and further sub-coded nodes to get coding 2. Using paper and pen to draw out each tree and use coloured pens to mark on points of concern or

further thought needed (red), questions to ask of the data (green) and possible overarching theme ideas (blue).

Doing spider diagrams and looking for overarching themes has made me realise that sub-categories from the descriptive codes I've identified here will come together under overarching themes, for example 'connecting with other people' might encompass something from knitters talking to you, knitting groups (teaching and community sub-categories) and history. So I anticipate the next stage will be to re-jig the descriptive codes until I'm happy and then keep that descriptive list but start making a new folder of codes which are the next level up. So eventually I'll have an overarching code with sub-categories which are descriptive. Starting this way to work up stage by stage from the data. I was struggling to see this stage until I thought a bit about what I'd learnt from doing the spider diagrams. Found it difficult to see the step between this muddle of 100+ descriptive codes to make something useful and work out why am I interested in this bit of data for each bit I'd coded ...

4th May 2014

Sandana's coding book made me realise it's OK to code things together that express conflicting points of view, e.g. the code for stress might include people who do find it stressful and people who say why they don't find it stressful, or under levelling and uniting it would be useful to also put where people view it the opposite way.

Going through putting second half of transcribed interviews in then will put pilot study, email questionnaire and reflective and transcribing notes into descriptive codes. Then have a go at reorganising descriptive codes and think about a second level of categories

I've been using some in vivo codes where they capture what I want.

I think I should take out knitting group/ outside knit group distinction once I've got all the interviews in.

Challenge / progression (same or different? Separate codes?)

Need 'social' as a motivation to knit as well as in knit group discussion I think but can probably pull out of what already coded.

I think therapeutic qualities is linked to a lot of other codes such as challenge (just the right amount of challenge to engage my brain but not too much that I find it frustrating), physical experience (grounding, natural wools, control) and I guess support and belonging.

Because people tend to want to be progressing, learning new things, it may be a long time that they feel mastery, hence some don't feel they would knit gifts, because they are always trying something new and then moving onto the next thing. Although people don't talk about long term aims and bettering their skills it's clear that for almost all of them if they were forced to knit using only the techniques they had tried now and no more, that knitting would lose something of its therapeutic qualities, sense of satisfaction and excitement.

Whilst many choose to do it because it is mindless in a sense, there is also a sense that it is engaging part of their mind, or at least when they start it it is.

Ideas for categories:

- Progression (instead of challenge? Because also captures when people talk about learning a new skill, even when they do not present this as hard, whereas challenge implies it is hard and also perhaps a bit more thought through, I'm not sure people think 'right, I want to challenge myself to do this...' or if they think 'I want to be able to do this stitch...'. But actually maybe they want to prove themselves, see if they can do it, and get a satisfaction from that, so they might not frame as challenge or test or competitive with self – are these quite masculine terms? Associated with traditional masculine activities such as sports (even fishing or golf), Munro bagging) no one has a tick list of things they want to achieve – or is this what the queue function on Ravelry is?
- Creativity and skills: is it appropriate to talk about these together? They have the shared issue of self-assessment and other-assessment, but creativity is perhaps more about looking at other people and thinking that's not me, whereas no-one has said they won't be able to achieve the same skills as someone else. Creativity is seen as something you either have or don't and skill something you get with time. Look at literature on making things from patterns, creativity and hobbies – are we right to look down on the creativity required to make

something from a pattern and consider designing as 'higher' level or might both be performing the same function for different people and therefore should be viewed in relation to how each individual sees it and therefore have parity of esteem. Bit of a design culture thing to view it as lesser?

- Pride: Tempting to say women downplay the pride they take in what they have made but is this actually reflected in the data? Also, is something about giving handmade gifts about pride - I think it is for me, I want to feel proud when someone says oh that's amazing, some interviewees point out that making someone a gift can be more about yourself than the receiver.
- Belonging: what identities or lifestyles [literature] do women choose to identify themselves with (creative, female, 'green'/ 'whole', giving, making something makes me 'real', internal – technical, private, personal, role based – mother, aunty, friend, knitting group member, woman, woman's group member). Also what benefits does this sense of belonging or identification have? We feel supported? We know who we are for that portion of our time? It is easy for others to identify us as thus on the train or in the home?
- Social: or is this actually more about use of time, belonging etc.? or valid as a category because it includes things like simply meeting friends getting ideas
- Chore, work: something to maintain my motivation in, sometimes done out of obligation – what other hobbies share this?

Appendix 4.2 Samples from reflective notes

This section contains extracts from the reflective notes completed after two interviews which took place during Stage 3 of the research. These extracts have been left in their original form as notes rather than tidied up in order to give the reader an accurate impression of them.

Reflective notes relating to interviews 6 and 7 (Fiona and Gemma)

Double interview didn't work so well, found it very difficult to concentrate on what both were saying and to remember what I wanted to follow up with each one. One was more dominant and more experienced in knitting so the other kind of got drowned out.

I found one of them didn't really like me. She came from a science background and whilst I set up she asked whether I was going for a representative cross section of the population. When I tried to explain my different approach I could tell there was a bit of a divide between us. However, once her friend had gone and I could be a better interviewer she warmed and by the end we were just chatting about knitting pleasantly. An example of what she said- that knitting provides a link between people.

The cafe was a bad location as was very noisy- hard to talk and also will be hard to transcribe.

One commented beforehand that it was very broad – but I didn't want to lead their answers so had not mentioned very much. Made me feel not very good but have to put up with?

Need to do a better intro with people who I haven't met before (they were referrals).

I keep thinking I'm not sure if they're saying anything useful. But I think I'm not quite sure where the line between my interpretation and forming analytical points/ and what they are saying. So they might say it is relaxing

but they're not going to then work that up into analytical point, as won't see it in context of what others say. I have to trust I'm going to be able to do this.

Reflections notes relating to interview 24 (with Amy)

Really enjoyable interview, I felt a little nervous not sure why maybe worrying about work has knocked my confidence. She has experience of supervising students and said how important she thought my work was which was very encouraging.

I worry that when I am questioning I am not getting into enough detail but I guess there isn't a point at which enough detail has been got. My list of questions tends to last about an hour and I do feel that I might struggle to do longer with the same level of engagement. I sometimes find it tricky to listen and nod and think about what to ask next. The previous interview to do this I realised I hadn't been so on the ball and hadn't asked everything I'd like to.

She was very pleased to be contacted again and several others have too. Good to know. I wonder if it would be useful to email a question or prompt once I have something specific.

Therapeutic, doing things with hands, making something, productive, pride, making oneself feel good, relaxing. Therapeutic goes beyond just relaxing for some, in this interview it went along with feeling good about having control over what she was doing at a time when she didn't have control, so not juts, for example listening to music, actually making as well.

She was particularly confident about her competency, put it down to experience and good with patterns, but some women have bags of experience and rarely change a pattern, and actually don't talk about it as particularly creative or that using patterns is a way for them to be creative cos they're really not. Is this true? Does it not really matter how creative following a pattern is, what matters is how the women see and present themselves. Why don't some think they are creative people? Is this something others

should try and change, would it change their relationship with knitting? More confidence etc...

Both naming yarn shops in Edinburgh together – sense of fun and playfulness, very reflective, in line with her profession.